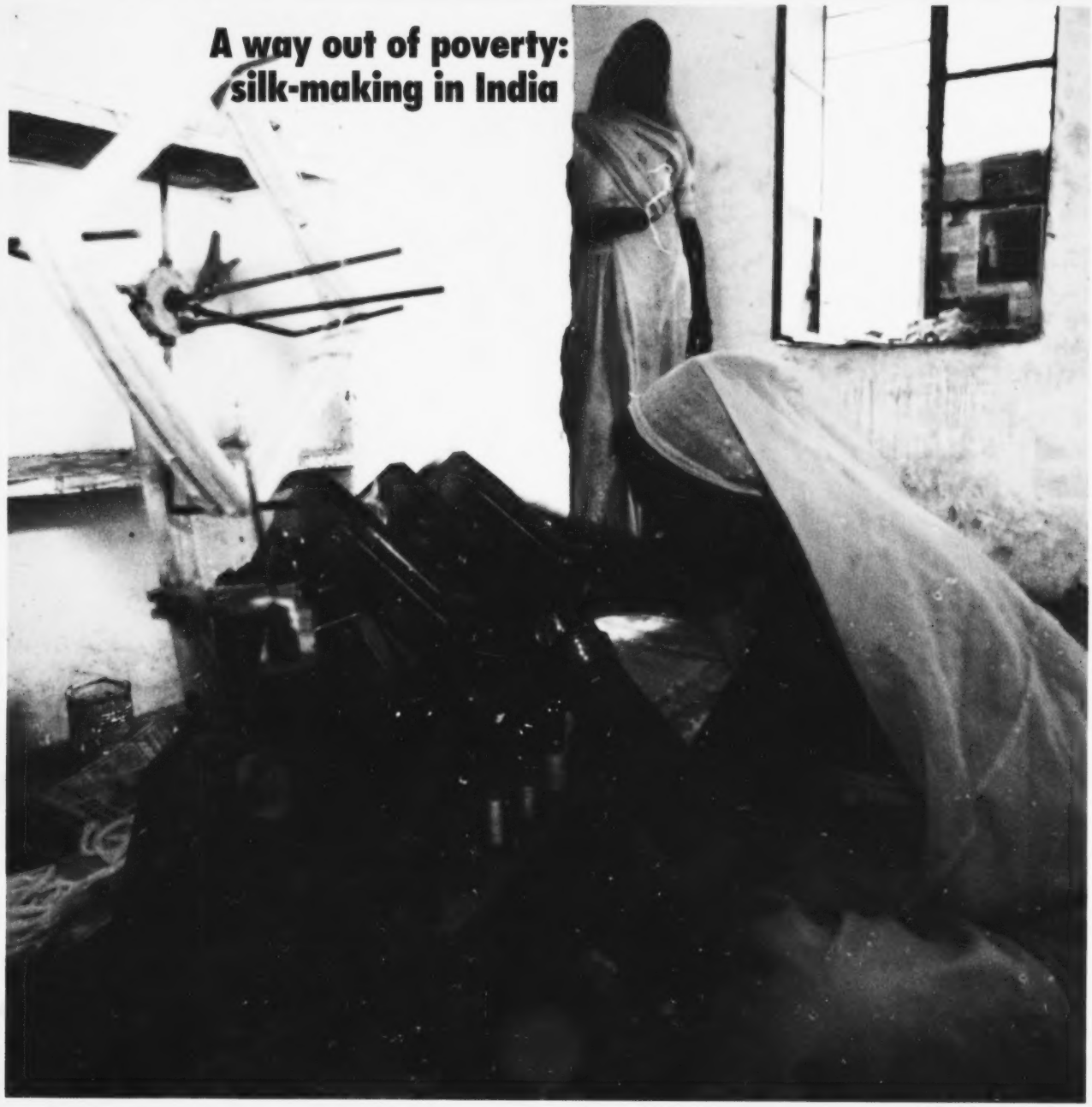
CHOICES

THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT MAGAZINE

A way out of poverty: silk-making in India



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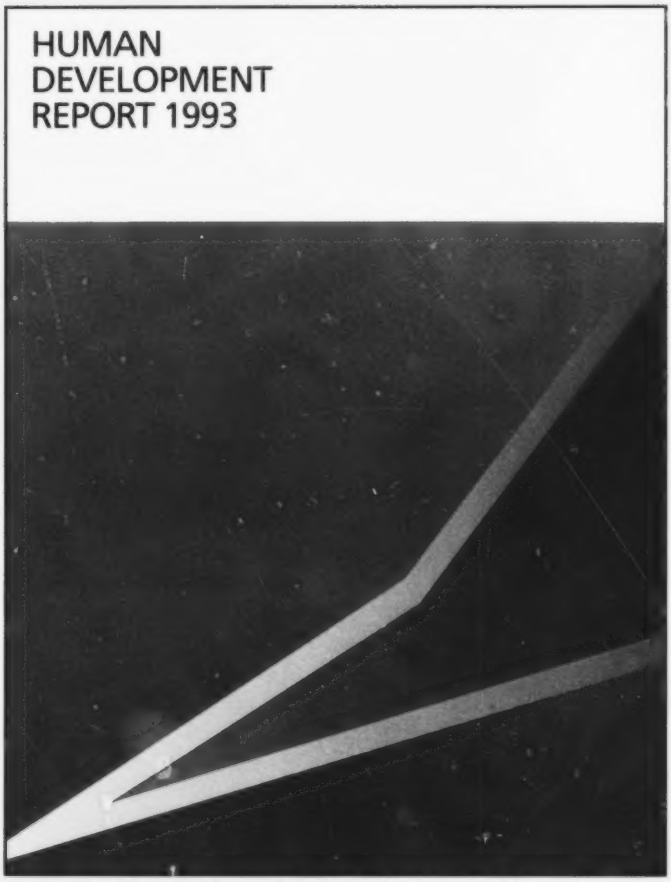

The cover illustrates the growth of the world economy (top line) and the lagging growth in jobs (bottom line).

Who shares? Only ten per cent of the world's people participate fully in the events and processes that shape their lives.

- **Economies** are growing but leaving people behind, which will result in a deficit of a billion jobs by the year 2000.
- **Minorities** get a small piece of the pie, even in the world's richest country. Whites in the USA rank first in human development, while African-Americans and Hispanics rank below some developing countries.
- **Political power** stays in national capitals, particularly in the developing world. On average, less than ten per cent of total national spending in developing countries is delegated to local government, versus 40 per cent in industrial countries.

Who cares? Many people, and for them, the ***Human Development Report 1993*** lays out the argument for wider participation in economies, politics and civil society. It sets strategies for "people-friendly markets," decentralization of government power and broader support to non-governmental organizations.

The Human Development Report 1993, published by Oxford University Press for the United Nations Development Programme, can be ordered through the publishers listed on the back cover of CHOICES.

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CHOICES

THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT MAGAZINE

VOL.2, NO. 4

SPECIAL REPORT

Life on Earth: Mapping Conservation Priorities Russell A. Mittermeier and Ian A. Bowles 4

VIEWPOINT

Profiteering from the Wisdom of the South Pat Roy Mooney 10

PHOTO ESSAY

The Silk Route to Development Gajra Kottary 13

FEATURES

Colombia Brings Government Closer to People Sarita Kendall 18

Armenia's Unending Winter David Orr 30

ISSUES

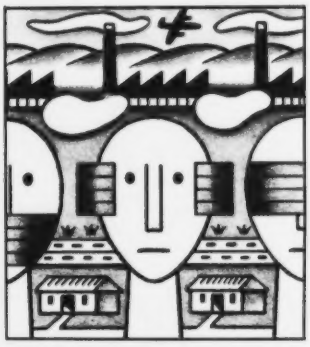
Running Just to Stay in Place: Water, Health and the Environment David Kinley 25

Human Rights Reconsidered Christopher Reardon. With viewpoints from Kenneth Roth, Elaine Hewitt and Adnan Buyung Nasution 34

LAST TAKE

Voting for Change in Niger 38

Page 4



Page 34

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Cover photo by Andrea Booher: Indian woman spins silk in a village in Rajasthan.

Printed on recycled paper.

Life on Earth: Mapping Conservation Priorities

By Russell A. Mittermeier and Ian A. Bowles

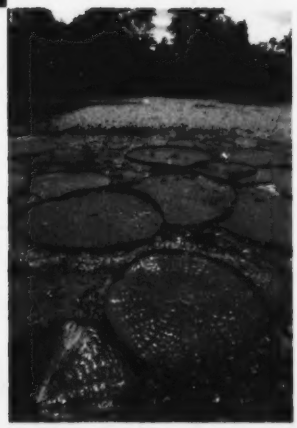
Our planet faces an array of environmental problems, from air and water pollution, hazardous waste disposal and soil erosion to global climate change and ozone layer depletion. These are coupled with explosive human population growth in the tropics and excessive resource consumption in the developed countries. One issue, however, surpasses all others in terms of long-term global impact: the loss of our planet's biological diversity.

Simply stated, biodiversity is life on Earth, comprising the ecosystems, ecological processes and the wealth of species that inhabit our planet. It is our living natural resource base and our biological capital in the global bank. Without it we could not endure as a species.

Biodiversity loss is an irreversible process. We can develop technological fixes for most other environmental ills, often lacking only the political will or economic incentive to do so. But once a plant or animal species becomes extinct, it is gone forever. We now face a series of potential, and possibly already ongoing, extinction spasms unlike anything since the disappearance of the dinosaurs 65 million years ago. Much of this loss has been caused by people, by the conversion of tropical forests into agricultural lands, overfishing, pollution and the effects of unsustainable levels of mining and timber production. The net result is that we are now at risk of losing not only single species or communities of species, but entire ecosystems. Ironically, we face this risk at a time when we are just starting to harness and realize the immense power of biodiversity.

Photos by Russell A. Mittermeier / Conservation Int'l

From top, clockwise: Margay kitten, emerald tree boa, Amazon lily pads, Galapagos seals, giant baobab trees, radiated tortoise, white Uakari monkey (centre).



Over the last five years we have seen international attention and concern grow, culminating at the 1992 Earth Summit with the completion of Agenda 21 and a major international Convention on Biological Diversity signed by 165 nations. Many donor governments are now moving to incorporate biodiversity conservation into their individual foreign assistance programmes, and are supporting the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the multilateral fund managed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank, with technical support from the UN Environment Programme (UNEP). Yet despite these new initiatives, biodiversity continues to be lost at an alarming rate. Shockingly, an estimated 40-44 million acres of tropical forests are believed to be disappearing annually, taking with them a plethora of life forms. At this rate, the majority of the remaining tropical forests will vanish by the end of the next century. The time is now for the international community to set immediate action plans and priorities to promote conservation, and to invest more in programmes that demonstrate the true value of biodiversity.

Why biodiversity matters

How much do we know about biodiversity and why is it important? After decades of obscurity, or simply being thought of as saving rain forests or protecting selected endangered species, the value of biodiversity conservation has slowly begun to emerge from the shadows. Ironically, it got its biggest boost when the US government refused to sign the Biodiversity Convention in Rio de Janeiro, a move that generated tremendous press coverage and forced many governments around the world to look at biodiversity for the first time. (The Convention was later signed by the Clinton Administration.) Despite growing public attention, however, the sum total of biodiversity knowledge is small, both in terms of the total diversity of species on Earth and the current and potential value of its use. We can send people to the moon and spacecraft to the farthest reaches of the solar system. We can put millions of bits of rapidly retrievable information on tiny computer chips, yet we do not know, probably to within two orders of magnitude, how many life forms share our planet. Clearly, our measure of biodiversity is embryonic at best.

Science has thus far described only about 1.4 million species of animals, plants and micro-organisms. However, estimates and projections made in the last few years indicate that total species diversity on Earth could be as much as 10 million, 30 million or perhaps 100 million or more (see chart on page 9). What's more, our ignorance of the ecological processes involving this multitude of organisms is even more profound.

The other glaring gap in our knowledge concerns the value of biodiversity. Placing value on the services provided by Earth's many species and ecosystems is difficult and, as a quantitative discipline, poorly developed at best. Functioning ecosystems buffer the world against possible climate changes and shifts, for example, in crop yields and sea levels. Most often, however, discussion of biodiversity value revolves around the potential for biotechnology innovations and new pharmaceuticals (possible cures for cancer and AIDS from the tropical rainforest), or a handful of products from tropical countries that are currently traded internationally (timber, rubber, and Brazil nuts from the Amazon, rattan from southeast Asia, etc.). The real value of biodiversity, however, based on actual current use is far more extensive (see page 9).

We now face a series of potential, and possibly already ongoing, extinction spasms unlike anything since the disappearance of the dinosaurs 65 million years ago.

While we may not always be aware of it, we all rely on biodiversity in our daily activities. In the US, 25 per cent of all pharmaceutical prescriptions contain active ingredients from plants, such as quinine, while some 3,000 antibiotics are derived from micro-organisms. Another important example is coffee. Not only a daily beverage for millions, coffee is also a major export crop for many Latin Ameri-

can and African countries. It is, however, also susceptible to diseases like fungal rusts. To maintain the genetic viability of coffee crops, it is important to conserve wild relatives in their places of origin, like the highlands of East Africa and the eastern rain forests of Madagascar, where more than 50 wild species of coffee grow.

Conservation in Madagascar therefore may be essential to the future of global coffee crops. Likewise, conservation of certain areas is critical to agriculture as we know it. Agriculture accounts for more than 30 per cent of the gross domestic product of low-income developing countries. The value of agricultural trade is in excess of US$3 trillion annually, yet much of our global civilization rests on the cultivation of only seven grasses: rice, wheat, barley, oats, sorghum, millet and maize. These require continued genetic input from wild relatives and cultivars to maintain their resistance to pests and disease. Natural diversity of the wild relatives of these seven grasses must be maintained and seed banks are not enough to do the job, as little evolution and adaptation can take place there. It is therefore crucial to protect areas where the wild relatives of these critically important species grow. Furthermore, an additional 20,000 species of grasses exist, the vast majority of which are not being used.

The opportunity to effect major change clearly exists, but requires leadership, greater understanding of biodiversity and the will to set priorities.

Biodiversity also has an enormous recreational use, and connected with this is the spiritual and psychological well-being of our own species. No one wants to see the entire planet turn into a desolate urban ecosystem shared mainly with rats, cockroaches and pigeons. Many studies have shown the damaging effects on the human psyche from long-term isolation from nature in urban environments. Increasingly, people are looking to the natural world for

Viewpoint: Why the Global Environment Facility needs reform

From the outset, biodiversity conservation was one of the GEF's four principal areas of concern. Forty per cent of the fund is designated for biodiversity, an amount that far surpasses the relatively small investments that have been made in this field over the past few decades. The GEF biodiversity projects range in cost from under $3 million in Cuba and Mauritius to $30 million investments under discussion for Mexico and Brazil.

Today, three years after its creation, the GEF is up for re-evaluation. It has immense potential to effect change, but major reforms are needed if it is to have real impact on protecting global biodiversity. What is the niche that the GEF seeks to fill? At present, the GEF is a loose aggregate of different activities, a set of projects that are really a variety of experiments, some piggy-backed on existing World Bank or UNDP-financed projects, and others that stand alone. It is hoped that following the pilot phase, the GEF will work closely with the Biodiversity Convention adopted in Rio de Janeiro, ensuring a more strategic and prioritized approach.

Since its creation, the GEF has assembled a portfolio of some 44 biodiversity projects with a total value of approximately $300 million. Because of the large scale of many of these projects, the immediate threat lies in allocating millions of dollars to fledgling natural resource management sectors, which in many developing countries are unable to use the money effectively. Part of the problem lies in the GEF's current operating style: restricting its funding to large-scale projects channeled only through central governments. This is poorly suited to biodiversity conservation.

To be successful, biodiversity conservation requires a flexible approach, with short project cycles and smaller initial investments, supported by longer-term funding to ensure continuity. The GEF Small Grants Programme for Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) – initiated and managed by UNDP – is a good first step, but represents only two to three per cent of the total GEF portfolio and has been slow to come on line.

Moreover, most of the expertise on biodiversity and much of the capacity to implement field projects rests outside the government sector. Under the circumstances, project review should be placed more in the hands of national or international NGOs with extensive experience in a country or project site. Finally, the GEF should work with governments and the NGO community to take a serious look at biodiversity conservation priorities.

Through the GEF, the international community has – at long last – the financial resources to conserve our poorly understood but globally critical natural resource base. The GEF is in a position to use the valuable lessons of its first three years to design a more effective structure for future biodiversity conservation efforts. **– R.M. and I.B.**

Keith Dana / Design Consultants, Inc.

■ *Rain-forest hotspots*
■ *Tropical wilderness areas*

Source: Conservation International

escape and as a means of maintaining their sanity, especially in the industrial nations. This translates into good economics as well, as the growing industry of ecotourism and other nature-based forms of recreation become increasingly popular. Worldwide, nature tourism generates more than $12 billion annually and it is likely to grow even more rapidly in the tropical countries, where it is quickly becoming a major foreign exchange earner.

Setting priorities for conservation

Biodiversity is by no means evenly distributed over the planet. Certain areas are far richer than others in overall diversity and in endemism (species that are found only in a particular place, and nowhere else). Many such places are under severe pressure. The potential large-scale loss of biodiversity that we currently face forces upon us a time-frame that requires very rapid, decisive and prioritized action.

Tropical rain forests provide us with a clear example. Recent estimates indicate that more than half of the Earth's original humid tropical forest has disappeared and about one-quarter of the remainder is degraded, with some countries and regions (Madagascar, the Philippines, the Atlantic forest region of eastern Brazil) already having lost *up to 95 per cent* of original forest cover. In areas like these, we have at best the remaining years of the decade in which to put in place appropriate conservation measures.

First, we have to set priorities that focus heavily on the Earth's richest and most diverse areas now at greatest risk. One way to pinpoint these areas is through the widely-used "threatened hotspots" approach. First conceived by the leading biodiversity expert Norman Myers, it focuses mainly on endangered tropical rain forests because overall they are the richest of the terrestrial biomes.

To date, some 15 priority tropical rain forest regions have been identified as "threatened hotspots." Together, they occupy approximately four per cent of the planet's land surface and harbour at least 30 per cent of all terrestrial life forms – and a much higher percentage of those which are at risk (see map). Although still at a very preliminary stage of analysis, the "hotspots" approach has been very useful in enabling governments, communities, international donors and NGOs to better target their conservation investments. With the goal of helping governments quickly assess the range of life forms present in threatened rain-forest areas, Conservation International developed the Rapid Assessment Program, which fields experts to a given location in the tropics to conduct quick surveys of its biological resources.

Efforts are also under way to determine "hotspot" areas of other major ecosystems or biomes. These include wetlands – such as the Pantanal of western Brazil, the Okavango Delta in Botswana and the Sudd Swamp of the Sudan. Also being studied are deserts, such as the Sonoran Desert of Mexico and the southwestern US and a number of large lakes, including the Rift Valley lakes of East Africa.

Other priority areas include specific countries that have vast biodiversity riches, the so-called "megadiversity countries." Some 12 countries are home to 60-70 per cent of the planet's life forms – including freshwater and marine life – and must therefore be strong candidates for international support. The richest of

Forests are burned for charcoal in Bahia, Brazil.

Over 50 species of wild coffee grow in Madagascar.

these countries are Brazil, Colombia, Indonesia, Madagascar, Mexico, Peru and Zaire.

Tropical forest areas that have remained pristine and largely intact – just the opposite of the "hotspot areas" – must also be prioritized for conservation efforts. These wilderness areas have great importance as storehouses of biodiversity, as major watershed areas, and are often the last places where indigenous peoples have any hope of maintaining a semblance of their traditional lifestyles.

Moreover, they are likely to assume increasing recreational, aesthetic and spiritual value on our ever more crowded planet. These areas include the southern portions of the three Guianas, southern Venezuela and adjacent parts of northern and western Amazonia in Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador, the Zaire Basin and most of New Guinea.

More than half of the Earth's original humid tropical forest has disappeared and about one-quarter of the remainder is degraded.

We are *not* recommending a focus on the above-mentioned priority areas to the exclusion of all else. Every country's biodiversity is important to its own viability and to the world at large, and must be conserved. What we are emphasizing is the need to recognize that certain parts of the planet have much higher concentrations of biodiversity than others, and that frequently these areas happen to be the ones at greatest risk. These places require a large share of our global investment in biodiversity conservation, perhaps even a share roughly proportionate to the diversity that they possess. Strategies for their conservation could include the establishment of parks and protected areas, major natural resource policy reform on the national, regional and local level, public awareness-building focusing on endangered species, and the development of markets for natural products – such as foods and oils that are harvested sustainably. Given the critical economic situation of many tropical countries, an emphasis on economically-based conservation alternatives is essential.

Protecting the world's biodiversity is an environmental challenge that cannot be addressed through technological innovation alone. Over the past several years the international community has made significant financial resources available to safeguard this poorly understood yet fundamentally important natural resource base. The opportunity to effect major change clearly exists but requires leadership, greater understanding of biodiversity and the will to set priorities and to take action.

While awareness is being built and funding generated, the challenge now is to translate these steps into concrete actions on the ground – on the front lines of the battle to protect the Earth's diverse and vital life forms. To succeed, these actions must be participatory in nature. They must be supportive of the economic needs and aspirations of local people, and build on their capacities to promote long-term conservation. ■

Russell A. Mittermeier is president of Conservation International, a non-profit organization based in Washington, DC, that focuses on conservation of biodiversity worldwide. Mr. Mittermeier also serves as chairman of the primate specialist group of the World Conservation Union's Species Survival Commission.

Ian A. Bowles is director of Conservation International's legislative programs and principal policy representative to the US government and international institutions.

This article was adapted from "The GEF and Biodiversity Conservation: Lessons to Date and Recommendations for Future Action." Copies may be ordered from Conservation International, Legislative Programs, 1015 18th Street, NW, Suite 1000, Washington, DC 20036.

The value of biodiversity

Geopolitical values. Biodiversity is important in maintaining global geopolitical stability, a term sometimes referred to as "ecosecurity." Environmental degradation in the poorer countries often leads, on a daily basis, to shortages of fuelwood, food, fibre and other diverse ecosystem products. These shortages, exacerbated by population pressures, economic and social crises, create a downward spiral that can be difficult to break.

If not dealt with in the near term, these small, degradation-based crises can coalesce into national and regional conflicts. In the Western Hemisphere, Haiti and El Salvador are examples of densely populated countries with badly degraded environments that have already entered into vicious cycles of political and economic instability. Breaking them will not be easy, with or without democracy, which has a tenuous hold at best in nations with such a range of problems.

The lack of options at home has driven a good portion of the population of these two countries to seek refuge elsewhere, generating another series of geopolitical stresses. Whatever political solutions may be devised, countries like these will not be viable over the long term without major restoration of their natural resource base.

Economic values. Frequently, the economic value of biodiversity is associated with international exports. Examples include timber from forest ecosystems and other common products such as rubber, Brazil nuts, rattan, and animal products such as fish and meat, which are regularly shipped across international borders.

Photos by Russell A. Mittermeier / Conservation International

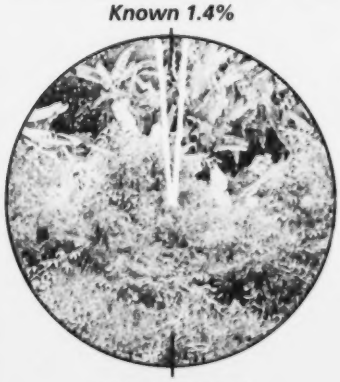
Products from the forest: a reed boat built by Uru Indians, Lake Titicaca, Peru.

Yet the vast majority of biodiversity is used within the borders of a particular nation, close to the habitat of origin, where it also derives significant economic value. Everyone depends on biodiversity in its endless manifestations, and this dependence is most evident in the developing countries of the tropics. The in-country uses can be divided into three categories: regional market, local market and household use.

The first category includes products that enter into the national or regional economy and may change hands several times, such as fish or fibres for clothing, increasing in value as they go along. *Local market* products are sold or marketed in a much more circumscribed area. Examples include medicinal plants or agricultural products from a small Amazonian town that are taken to other nearby villages.

Products that have more immediate *household use value* are those that are obtained from a given ecosystem and are used by the individual, family or indigenous group that collects or produces them. An example is game meat eaten by a hunter and his family, thatch for a house, or a piece of bark used to brew a tea for headaches. **— R.M. and I.B.**

Known diversity as a per cent of possible total diversity



Source: Conservation International

Profiteering From the Wisdom of the South

Though much of the world's biological diversity is found in the South, control over genes, plants, animals and other living organisms is increasingly in the hands of Northern interests. Researcher and activist Pat Roy Mooney argues that the growing trend toward the patenting of life forms violates the intellectual integrity of indigenous and other Third World communities, and is stifling innovation in the South. While the issue is complex and as yet largely unexplored, UNDP has begun developing a project that will help indigenous communities maintain control over the biological resources that they have cultivated for centuries. CHOICES welcomes alternative views on this and other topics of development debate.

When Aklilu Lemma was brought to an Ohio university to pick up an honorary doctoral degree, the Ethiopian scientist was wined and dined the night before by the university's president and faculty. It was over dinner that Dr. Lemma described his research with E44 – a particularly potent strain of endod (the African soapberry plant) – and its remarkable capacity to thwart schistosomiasis, one of the major parasitic diseases afflicting children in the tropics. For centuries, innovative Ethiopian women had cultivated endod as a laundry detergent and shampoo. In water, it kills the snails that harbour the parasite that causes the disease. Ethiopian scientists had crusaded, with little success, to convince Northern institutes to devote the time and money necessary to develop endod as a prevention to one of the world's major scourges. Dr. Lemma's hosts were properly horrified by the failure of Western science to appreciate informal innovation in the South. They also wondered if endod might kill zebra mussels – a scourge not of children but of the shipping industry on the Great Lakes of the US, where the mussels cling to hulls and hamper canal system operations.

Back at his hotel, Dr. Lemma and university scientists worked out an experiment to pit endod against the unwanted mussel interlopers from Asia. By the time he received his honorary degree the next day, Dr. Lemma knew his experiment had worked. That was on 15 June 1990. Exactly four months later, on 15 October 1990, the university filed a patent application on the use of endod to kill zebra mussels. The patent is still pending –

and so is the estimated US$5 billion market awaiting its use in North American waters. The university is reported to have at least one major chemical company lined up to commercialize the product, with the agreement that more than 80 per cent of any ensuing royalties would remain in the US. Meanwhile, endod's true discoverers, the women of Ethiopia, continue their lonely war against schistosomiasis.

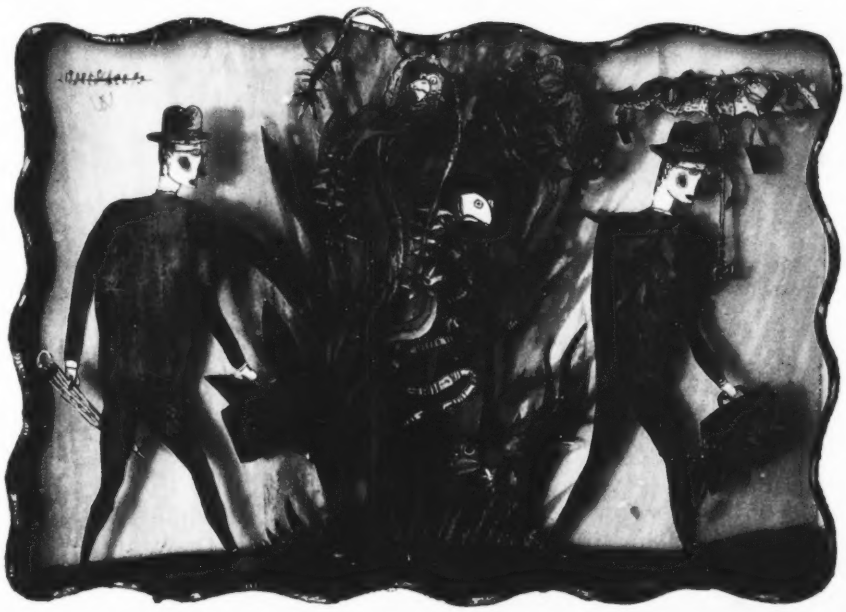


Illustration by Henrik Drescher

Then there is Margosan-O, a patented product developed from Asia's neem tree, now the exclusive monopoly of a US-based multinational chemical company. Billed as an organic insecticide new to US farmers, it is hardly new to farmers and medicinalists from East Africa to the Western Pacific, who have availed themselves of the neem tree's potent compounds for centuries.

On the pharmaceutical front, CPT11, a new drug developed in Japan from an Indian plant called camptothescin, is under patent and in clinical trial in the US. The medicinal plant seems to have a knack for preventing cancerous cells from multiplying.

For food processors, another patent application is pending in the world patent office in Geneva for thaumatin and the serendipity plant – both prodigious sweeteners long used in West Africa. Thaumatin is 100,000 times sweeter than cane sugar. If granted, the patent would prohibit some uses of the plant not merely in Europe and North America but also in the countries that discovered and nurtured it.

These patents are all examples of what the South has come to call "klepto-monopoly" or "bio-piracy." Technically, naturally-occurring organisms cannot be patented. But recent US patent court decisions and a growing trend in the opposite direction have begun to expose the vast biological and genetic diversity of the South's flora and fauna to the prey of patent lawyers. Traditional requirements for patent applicants to prove that they have taken an "inventive step" and not merely "discovered" something – and to show that their invention offers something "useful" to society – are now slipping into history as the booming biotech industry fights for market power. New interpretations of patent law – originally designed to protect light bulbs and sewing machines – are now being loosely applied to tulip bulbs, rice and even bits and pieces of the human brain.

As the patents for endod and Margosan-O show, the biotech industry is not merely slapping patents on "wild" nature, but also on the past and

present inventions of community innovators, including indigenous peoples. The argument for allowing this is essentially biased: inventions are only patentable if they are submitted by lawyers and backed by scientists. Inventions must conform to Western standards. Indigenous peoples have commercially irrelevant arts and crafts and folklore; biotech companies have science – and lawyers.

The drive to establish monopolies over life forms has still other dimensions: Another American company has won a patent for genetically-modified cotton that gives it exclusive rights over all forms of genetically-engineered cotton in the US. Patent applications are pending in Europe, Brazil and India, among other countries. This $20 billion crop is now effectively closed to scientific innovation in the South – unless the South can pay the licensing fees – and even then, only if the company is willing to sell licenses.

All kinds of biodiversity are, as logic would suggest, related. There is a powerful correlation, for example, between the loss of culture and the loss of agriculture. Not only has the world lost two-thirds of its languages, but it has also lost a somewhat greater share (70 - 75 per cent) of its plant genetic diversity for major food crops. By and large, both losses have occurred in the same locales. When cultures are eroded, humanity's knowledge – and protection – of medicinal plants and traditional crops also erodes.

The biotech industry is not merely slapping patents on "wild" nature, but also on the past and present inventions of community innovators, including indigenous peoples.

What can be done? First, the whole notion of intellectual property rights over living materials needs broad societal review. The system is no longer self-correcting in the courts and even some major companies believe patents are out of control. Secondly, the intellectual integrity of community innovators must be acknowledged and advanced. There is an urgent need for an international funding mechanism, under the auspices of a UN agency, that conserves and develops indigenous knowledge on a programme and project basis. Such a fund should give indigenous communities the right to control and withhold their innovations and materials in the recognition that, in the long term, such knowledge will benefit all humanity.

Finally, patent courts in industrial countries need to institutionalize new regulations that can help to ensure that bio-pirates don't make off with the inventions of others. It is not preserving the past that we are concerned about, it is safeguarding the future for the benefit of all. ■

Pat Roy Mooney is founder and executive director of the Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI), a non-governmental organization headquartered in Ottawa, Canada. Among RAFI's concerns are the protection of biodiversity among indigenous communities around the world.

The Silk Route to Development

Andrea Booher

Spinning silk.

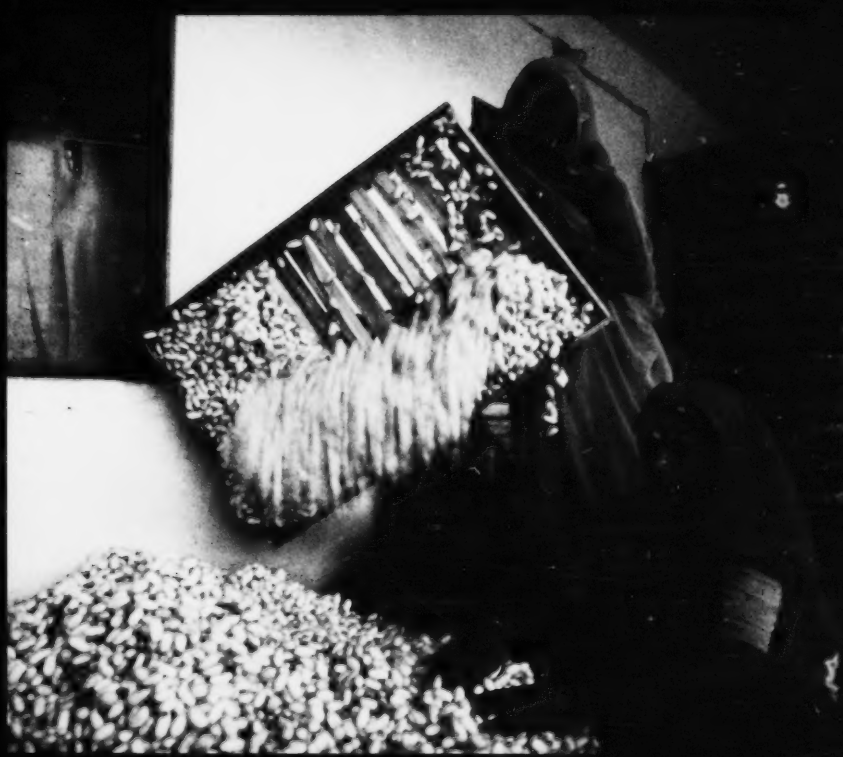
The introduction of sericulture into tribal communities in northwest India has created new opportunities for women.

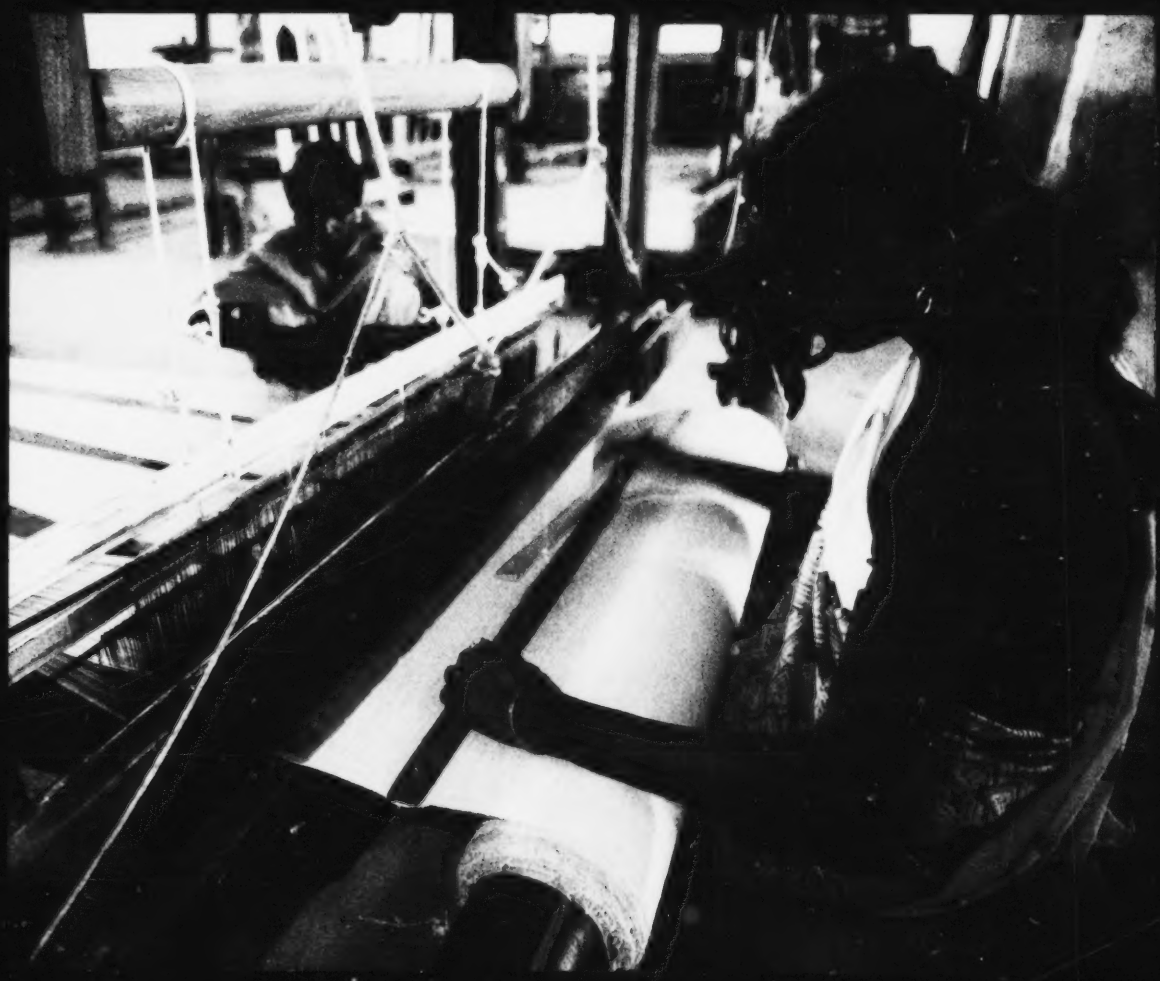
BY **Gajra Kottary**
PHOTOGRAPHS BY **Andrea Booher**

Rajasthan, India—In the arid lands of northwest India, amid the desolate landscape and simple villages near the city of Udaipur – a city renowned for its shimmering Lake Palace – a novel sericulture project has brought good fortune to Bhil tribal women and their families. "I am leading the kind of life that my mother could only dream of," says Andu, a Bhil woman from the village of Nichlaphala. "And I no longer need to work long back-breaking hours in the fields."

continued on page 16

Sericulture has proven to be an ideal activity here for ecological as well as economic reasons.





Opposite page, counter-clockwise from top: Mulberry bushes are cultivated and fed to silkworms.

Bamboo implements used in silkworm rearing.

Andu and her husband tend rearing racks, where silkworms form cocoons.

Cocoons are sorted and boiled to loosen a single strand of silk that is carefully unravelled.

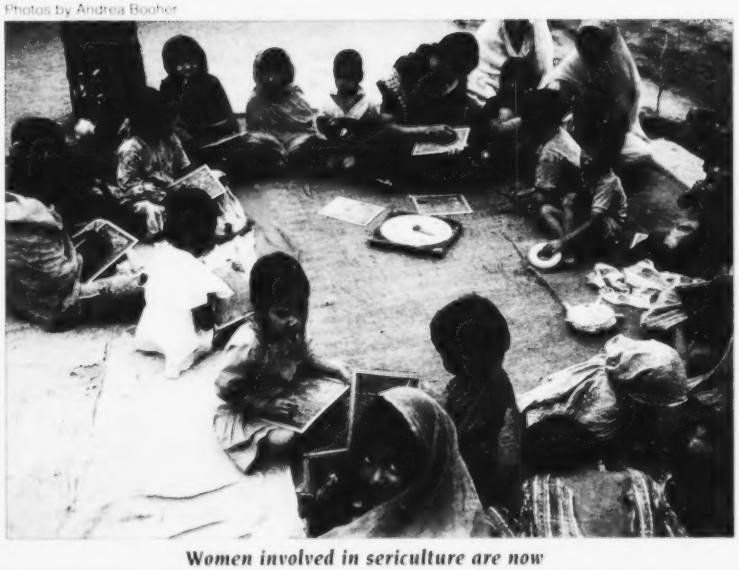
High quality silk thread.

This page, top left: Silk strands are spun into thread.

Top right: Silk thread being readied for weaving.

Right: Silk fabric being woven for a leading sari maker.

Photos by Andrea Booher



Women involved in sericulture are now working to improve village schools.

Before taking up sericulture in 1988, Andu spent most of her time working the tiny land holdings of her family, which typically yielded only a few bushels of wheat – barely enough to feed her family. Today, Andu earns Rs20,000 a year (US$700), a princely sum by tribal standards and 40 times more than the average family income of Rs500. In a region where few send their children to school, Andu has sent her two daughters to a district college.

At the heart of such stories of change is the silkworm, which has brought a quiet revolution to 12 villages in this rural part of India. The sericulture activities were introduced into the Bhil communities through a project launched by the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in 1982, in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The 300 women who originally took part, who come from small villages like Pai and Nichlaphala, were persuaded to grow mulberry trees on part of their fields; the mulberry leaves are used to feed the silkworms that are provided to them through the project two or three times a year. The silkworms are reared for about 25 days until they begin to spin cocoons. The cocoons are taken to a centralized reeling centre in Sisarma village to be processed into silk thread which is sold to weavers from all over the state. Profits from the sales are later distributed among the women, who also receive training in processing the silk.

While not a traditional industry in Rajasthan, sericulture has proven to be an ideal activity here for ecological as well as economic reasons. The mulberry tree has deep roots which seek out low underground water, enabling it to survive without irrigation through extended periods of drought. The soil therefore retains moisture, providing a fertile patch of land for cabbage, spinach, carrots and mushrooms, which are planted among the mulberry trees. Before the project began, most of the Bhil tribes had never eaten vegetables since the soil was too barren to grow them. Now, nutritional levels here have improved.

Project officials recall that the effort did not get off to an easy start. For one thing, they had a tough time persuading local villagers that the development of sericulture was in their best interests. Deep-seated traditionalism, and innate suspicion of urban dwellers, made them wary. Bhil farmers were also reluctant to give up almost half their fields for mulberry cultivation – since the little wheat and maize they produced were vital food sources. Finally, many of the men also felt uneasy about an initiative that placed so much attention on women.

"It was a very trying time," recalls Prafulla Nagar, a project officer with the Tribal Area Development Authority, which is implementing the programme. "In almost all the areas I visited, my visions of a better future for the Bhils were met with stoic silence. It was only after many visits, and much persuasion, that they were prepared to half-believe me."

For Mr. Nagar, success came when members of one village asked him to swear in front of statues of their deities that he would not abandon them, and would truly work to help better their lives.

In the small village of Pipalwas, Mangala Ram, a community leader (known also as Maharaj, meaning Lord) was a big help in encouraging his neighbours to take up sericulture.

A believer in women's causes, Maharaj is proud to relate how, in his village, women who had previously never seen money are now using it judiciously to improve the lot of their families. "Seven years ago, 20 money lenders thrived on business from this village by enslaving most of us in perennial debt," he says. "Today, they have been rendered jobless." He proudly points out that his wife has earned an impressive

Rs36,000 from sericulture ($1,250) in five years.

While silk production was quick to become an important income-generating activity in parts of Rajasthan, other objectives relating to improved health and better lifestyle were slow in being met. "At first, much of the income was being frittered away on the wrong things – such as alcohol and festivities. Malnutrition was still rampant and knowledge of health care was meagre," says Madhubala Nath, UNIFEM's regional programme adviser in India. "Our goal had only been partially achieved. So we decided to focus more closely on these broader issues by involving other UN agencies and NGOs which were active in the area."

One such agency was the World Food Programme (WFP), which was operating a successful food-for-work programme in India that was helping to reduce malnutrition. The UN Population Fund (UNFPA) also became involved as it was already supporting local community-based health education and training. Both the UNFPA and WFP activities were extended to assist the Bhil families in the sericulture programme. A local NGO, Aastha, which has a long track record of community organizing in the area, also joined the project's second phase, which started in 1990 and enabled another 200 families to participate.

Aastha began by organizing 500 women into groups known locally as Mahila Mandals, which meet monthly. The meetings focus closely on health and family welfare issues. The women chalk out work programmes for the coming month – activities including the distribution of silkworms, the making of bamboo implements for silk-

Prafulla Nagar helped mobilize community support for sericulture.

worm rearing, poultry farming and vegetable intercropping. They also play a supervisory role in the operation of health centres and village primary schools, and have taken on the uneasy task of acting as community watchdogs.

Members of the Mahila Mandal in the village of Pai, for example, have succeeded in lobbying for a health centre and have applied pressure on schoolmasters who were neglectful of midday student meals. Health workers who have lagged in immunization follow-ups for children have not been spared either. At their meetings, women also focus on how they can combat social problems like adultery and alcoholism among their men. These women have also become increasingly aware of environmental concerns and explain how they resisted the efforts of contractors who had sought to do illegal tree-felling in nearby jungles.

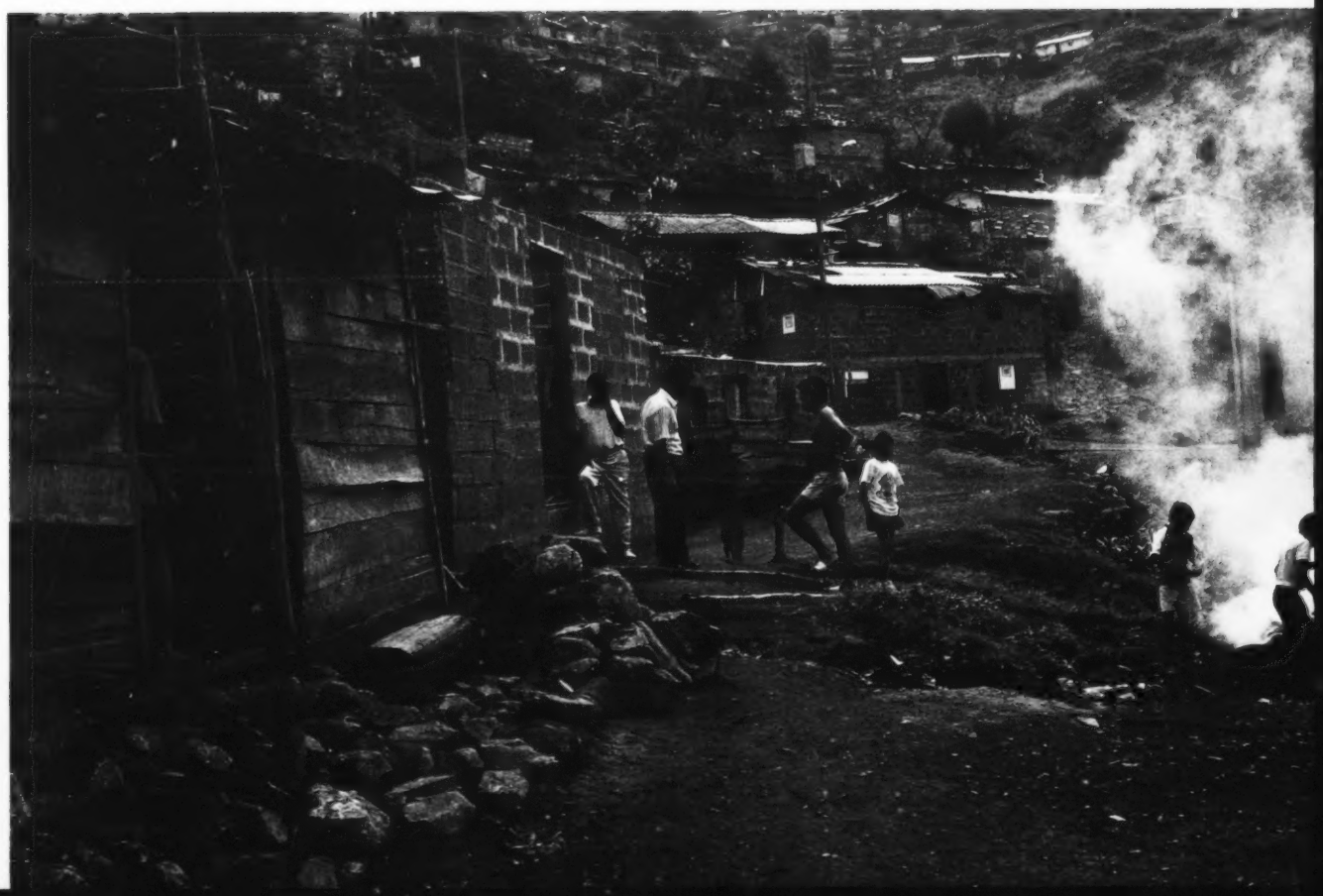
At any of the Mahila Mandal meetings, success stories abound. Sixty-year-old Mogi from Pai, located 31 kilometres west of Udaipur, has been practising mulberry cultivation and silkworm rearing since 1988 and earns Rs5,600 ($196) a year from the two crops of mulberry grown on her field. Before taking up sericulture, her family earned a meagre Rs450 ($16) a year. Similarly, Punki, another Bhil woman, has earned Rs35,000 in five years from sericulture-related activities. This sum has been used to pay off a long-standing loan, to re-dig the family well and to make silver jewellery. "We have been able to pay off our debts and to build a new brick and mortar house," she says.

After funding from the project runs out, the women plan to continue independently. Already, another 900 families from neighbouring villages have joined this grassroots enterprise on their own, investing money to purchase the necessary mulberry bushes and silkworms.

While directly benefiting tribal women, the sericulture initiative has also given many others in the poor villages of Rajasthan a reason for hope. And as the project begins to wind down, officials associated with it are beginning to focus more closely on helping the women operate as village entrepreneurs. "We're moving quickly towards self-sufficiency," says Ms. Nath. "We want to ensure that they can function on their own in a market-oriented system, without being protected by subsidies."

And how are they faring? Ms. Nath replies: "We're seeing their overall abilities and skills improve dramatically." ■

Gajra Kottary is a freelance journalist in Bombay.



Colombia Brings Government Closer to People

By Sarita Kendall

Aiming to foster peace in a country wracked by violence, and to bring new life to the development process, Colombia has embarked on a ground-breaking programme of decentralization.

Bogotá—Colombia is in the throes of one of the most radical decentralization programmes in all of Latin America. Already, this transfer of power is bringing democratic politics to the local level, massive restructuring of national and local administration and the assignment of ever greater resources for social investment by municipalities. Although there is considerable excitement over the scope now opening up for local participation and development, the speed and size of the fiscal transfers have made many central government officials nervous.

"We're bringing the decisions that matter closer to the people, and sharing more revenues with them," says Rudolph Hommes, Colombia's minister of finance. "It's revolutionary in the sense that 10 years ago everything was centred in Bogotá."

On purely geographical grounds, Colombia lends itself to decentralization. Chopped up by deep gorges, broad tropical valleys and towering cordilleras, it has climates and vegetation ranging from chilly Andean heights to desert scrub and humid Amazon forest. Some remote municipalities can only be reached by plane or boat, while the pot-holed, winding road network hampers communications by land.

Photos by Sarita Kendall

Power and resources are being decentralized from Bogotá (above) to underserved areas. Top left: A community leader explains new legislation in a Medellin barrio.

Although Colombia has had mainly centralist governments since the Spaniards established colonial rule in 1564, both population and industry are fairly well distributed. Four cities have over a million people each. Bogotá, the capital, is home to less than 16 per cent of the nation's population. Contrasts in ethnicity, economy, food, accents, music and even humour contribute to a regional patchwork, which means that a successful approach to development in one area will not necessarily translate to another.

The government's aim is to reduce inequalities – not diversity – between regions and people. The formula adopted by Congress in 1986 to distribute fiscal income is based on "unsatisfied needs" and weighted in favour of poorer municipalities. But large, rich municipalities such as the city of Medellin with its 1.8 million people have some of the biggest income disparities within their boundaries. Officials there are already tackling problem areas with special programmes.

For cities like Medellín, as well as the smaller towns that make up Colombia's 1,026 municipalities, decentralization means that residents can elect their own leaders and share more directly in determining how money will be spent. "It's a concrete way of making democracy work," says Arturo Hein-Caceres, resident representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Colombia. "Local authorities and communities are becoming responsible for building their own future."

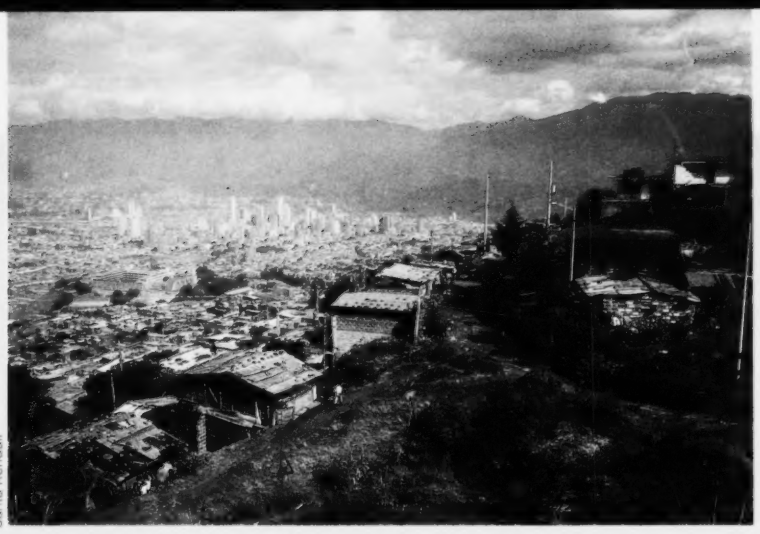
The government of President César Gaviria views decentralization as an essential part of broader economic and political reforms. "I see much more creativity in the future; things will bloom if we let more power go," says Cecilia Maria Vélez, assistant director of the National Planning Department. "And the election of mayors and governors is an essential part of this process."

Until 1988, governors and mayors were appointed, reinforcing national party cliques in towns and villages throughout Colombia. The move towards greater political participation has been an important element in the search for new avenues to achieving peace.

Colombia has a long history of violence, with a succession of brutal civil wars dating back to the last century. In the 1940s and 1950s, rival Conservative and Liberal gangs terrorized the countryside in repetitive cycles of massacres, assassinations and revenge, while communist and peasant rebels carved out "independent republics" in central Colombia. Some 300,000 people died in these bloodied decades, and many more fled from the rural battlefield to seek refuge in the cities. A joint Liberal-Conservative coalition was devised in 1958 to end the violence, with alternating presidents and no genuine electoral choice.

When the power-sharing front ended in 1974, Colombia acquired a more democratic face, but there was deeply ingrained disillusionment with the political establishment and the inefficacy of the state. Timid efforts were made to lessen the bureaucracy, but

The government's aim is to reduce inequalities – not diversity – between regions and people.



Santa Kendall

About 12 per cent of Medellín's population live in makeshift barrios.

Empowering Medellin's Poor

Many years ago, Medellín outgrew the broad deep valley in which it lies, and since then residential barrios have been creeping up the unstable mountain slopes overlooking the city. The views may be spectacular, but the terrain is steep and fragmented by dozens of garbage-filled gulleys. About 12 per cent of the city's population lives in barrios with poor physical and social infrastructure, unemployment problems and no legal tenure on their precariously sited homes.

Many of the barrios sprang up in the 1950s and 1960s as migrants moved in from the countryside, causing Medellín's population to grow by over six per cent a year. Now the population growth rate is down to 1.8 per cent, yet there is little space for schools, community halls or recreation in these densely settled areas.

Since 1992, UNDP has been working with the city government, NGOs and barrio committees on a US$31 million programme called Primed, which covers 11,000 families in three zones of the city. Primed is helping people improve their houses, consolidate services, legalize over 5,000 properties and protect the barrios from landslides and other environmental hazards. Some of the cost will be contributed by communities themselves, through savings and labour.

People in La Primavera and 13 de Noviembre, two of the barrios receiving help, are excited at the prospect of legalizing their homes. "The property will gain value – and feel as if it's your own. It's worth putting more work into it," says Don Jairo, who is on the committee created to measure lots and organize documentation.

Most of the roads are too precipitous for vehicles to climb and have to be turned into steps with deep V-shaped drains on either side to channel rainwater. Residents are working on stone terraces and earth banks to shore up small red brick houses that are piled almost on top of one another. Yet the wealth of aerial cables shows that everyone has electricity, there are functioning pay phones and land is somehow being found for a basketball court and a secondary school.

Transport is scarce – a noisy truck winds up through La Primavera with people hanging out over the back. Right at the top, new shacks have sprung up. Don Fredy, a community leader, points to a notice warning that the area is unsafe and says the houses will have to be relocated. He arrived here 13 years ago and has seen the barrios take shape, the muddy paths turning into paved walkways, the preschool centres being organized.

Primed has brought experienced community leaders from different barrios together on legalization, housing and geological risks committees. Traditional rivalries are being overcome, ideas for improvements are emerging and there is a sense of busy involvement. While the longer-term planning objectives may not be easily understood, the speed at which some of the projects are materializing reinforces credibility and commitment among people who have heard all kinds of promises before. **– S.K.**

large areas of the country remained neglected, many of which were under the control of guerillas.

From the mid-1970s on, drug trafficking began to permeate the country's political, economic and social institutions, with more visible corruption. With the profusion of guerrilla, paramilitary, drug, self-defence and criminal gangs, violence intensified again. In the-mid 1980s, the government began peace talks with the guerrillas, encouraging them to abandon the armed struggle for electoral politics. This had limited success. But it highlighted the hunger for greater participation and culminated in the election of the constitutional assembly that drafted the 1991 Constitution, strengthening decentralization.

Throughout this period most local governments had little money to spend on social programmes, resulting in increasingly aggressive regional strikes by peasants and workers. A national rehabilitation plan began to reach out to the areas worst affected by violence and poverty in the late 1980s, attempting to defuse some of the hatred by involving communities in local development.

"People must start resolving their own problems," says Ms. Vélez. "They can't just sit and complain about the national government. Energies being used up in conflict must be harnessed for other purposes."

Legislation passed in 1986 gave municipalities an increasing share of the national sales tax, and greater responsibility for planning and providing services. Their share of national fiscal income rose from 5.3 per cent in 1987 to 12 per cent in 1992 and is expected to reach 22 per cent in 2002. Towns and villages in oil- and mineral-producing areas have also begun receiving a production royalty. According to new laws developed under the 1991 Constitution – which strongly endorsed all forms of participation as well as political and administrative devolution – the lion's share of resource transfers will begin in 1994. Under the new allocation procedures, provinces and municipalities will eventually share nearly 50 per cent of all fiscal income. These transfers will proceed gradually as authorities show their technical ability. Even so, economists are alarmed that too much is being handed out too quickly, and that controls are not solid enough to prevent great wastage over the next few years.

UNDP has been involved at many levels of the decentralization process, particularly in strengthening local institutions so that they are able to cope with new responsibilities. Small municipalities with little experience of budgeting or planning are learning to formulate projects and open the doors to community ideas.

The strategy is to send in a specially trained "agent," who can help the mayor's office diagnose problems, and with planning and methodology. "We need to reach not only the current mayors, but the next group that will be elected to ensure longer-lasting results," says Margarita Jaramillo of the National Planning Department.

Francisco Huérfano is the supporting agent for Guataquí, a farming township of 4,000 people on the banks of the Magdalena River in central Colombia. "The mayor is the key figure. If he or she is energetic and committed, like the mayor of Guataquí, then the process works," he says. "But some mayors just want to leave lots of meaningless public works. The mayor of Guataquí built a drinking water system in his first term and is expanding schools. We're now identifying other possible projects with him."

Trees with red and yellow flowers shade Guataquí's main plaza, and stone paving leads down to the rushing Magdalena where conquistadors once boarded boats for the Caribbean coast. At midday the streets are hot and empty, but as the shadows lengthen, women hover chatting on doorsteps and children come out to play basketball near the municipal offices. A swimming

"I see much more creativity in the future; things will bloom if we let more power go."

pool is being built to try and attract weekend tourists from Bogotá. The town's children say they expect to use it only once, on opening day. After that, there will be an entry fee.

Although there are plenty of problems in a small, provincial place like Guataquí, Mr. Huérfano singles the budget out as one of the main bottlenecks. In the past, government transfers paid most of the town's operating costs. In 1994, Guataquí will be expected to raise its own revenues and pay its own staff. Government funds – which will grow as the municipality demonstrates its efficiency–are to be used only for investment. But unless Guataquí can boost its own income, it is in danger of being swallowed up by a neighbouring municipality. The task is daunting: more than half of the town's economically active population is unemployed, and families living in mud huts with thatched roofs contribute little in the way of taxes. Making matters worse, recent floods destroyed part of the maize crop.

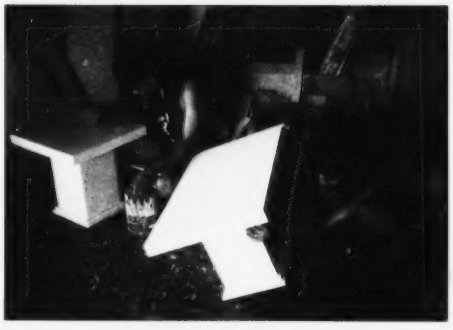
Rosanna Villanueva, who works for the town of Guataquí, says what is really needed is better planning. "People don't really know what planning is about, they think it's not worth bothering with," she says. "Here they're used to paternalism. Hardly anyone comes in from the countryside to join in meetings." Yet there are 10 community associations in the area and a locally-elected council.

But the council is sometimes more of an impediment to the mayor than a support, admits the Guataquí council president. Because council members did not understand the legalities of a project to create a special housing fund, for example, they simply shelved it, and the municipality lost the resources. In the future, all elected officials will have to present development plans when campaigning, and there are now legal procedures for throwing out mayors and governors who do not deliver on electoral promises.

Rodrigo Guerrero, the mayor of Cali, was elected by a broad coalition in 1992. He holds municipal cabinet meetings in the comunas (both Cali and Medellín are subdivided into comunas), informing local groups and receiving suggestions and criticisms from them. "We've already had small-scale meetings on health, security and other matters with all 20 comunas," says Mr. Guerrero. "Community associations are being encouraged to propose and carry through on projects, and the system is working well."

Colombia's biggest cities – Bogotá, Cali and Medellín – have created local administration centres in the last three years, where people can deal with day-to-day bureaucratic errands, such as applying for a car licence or putting in a request for road maintenance. Each of Cali's 20 comunas has a local administration centre, which together offer more than 130 different services. The centre serving Siloé, for example, a poor barrio plagued by gang warfare, is strong on community development and has lawyers and psychologists working on domestic violence. The new Con-

Photos by Sarita Kendall



The municipal headquarters and planning team of Guataquí.

A library for children in a Cali barrio.

Furniture makers in a Cali barrio receive training and other support.

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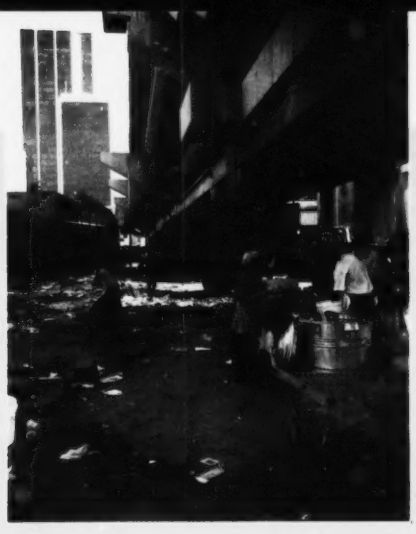


Street sellers set up shop in the shadows of Medellín's metro.

Reclaiming City Centres

Decentralization has brought special attention to the plight of run-down city centres. The long stop-start process of constructing the Metro system in the heart of Medellín has exacerbated the central area's problems. Street sellers, garbage recyclers and vagrants have set up in the shadow of elevated sections across from a prestigious hotel. This is expected to change, however, once the Metro begins operations in 1995. Land use regulations will be put into effect and Medellín's bus network will be reorganized, providing opportunities for urban restructuring.

Sergio Betancur, a businessman who manages Medellín's central area programme, is enthusiastic about the transformation he hopes to see: "People like the centre. Nearly three-quarters of the city's population come here at least once a week. We have to capitalize on its special advantages, its diversity and scale. Everything must be decided with the participation of the community; there are already 22 civic committees formed."

Mr. Betancur went on to list some of the problems – security, pollution, parking, lack of open space and the sad state of many historic buildings. Tax incentives have been proposed by municipal authorities to spur new activities. One of the aims is to attract 150,000 new residents. Already, a construction company is going ahead with 400 new housing units.

The street sellers who crowd every spare inch of the centres, touting wares from sunglasses to fruit juices and sneakers, are a major headache in Medellín and Cali. Police sweeps have largely been ineffective, and both city administrations are now adopting a different approach that involves training to help vendors enhance their earning power, along with discussions about relocation.

"The sellers were very suspicious at first, they're used to repression," says Carlos Fernando, who runs the courses in Cali. "But then they see the point of the training, which includes administration, accounting, marketing and investment, and they get interested. They often don't know what they're spending, and when they're desperate they'll sell for any price. But they do know a lot about the street environment. We're learning from them."

Out of 8,000 street vendors in the centre of Cali, 1,000 have received training, attending workshops on self-esteem, on what it means to be on the street, and on how such families function. The vendors are also shown a video about the city and its planning problems, and discuss what part they play.

Relocation has been unpopular in the past since many vendors were pushed off into places where they could not do the same amount of business. They were also charged for their sites. Now the idea is to choose areas acceptable to the vendors, who will determine how the sites will be managed and maintained.

Just off Cali's main commercial centre is a ravaged zone known as the "Olla" – literally, the stew-pot. Glue-sniffing children, prostitutes, drug dealers, thieves and trash recyclers control the territory, which the local administration aims to recuperate. The plan includes a hostel for the children of prostitutes, special subsidies for slum tenants to buy homes and a complex for recycling.

A youth centre, created with support from UNDP, is already drawing some of the area's young people, with its aerobic and dancing classes. They can also use a computer there to link into a specially designed database that provides information on ecological groups, employment, reference libraries and a host of other activities. **– S.K.**

stitution introduced special procedures citizens can follow to protect rights that the clogged legal system has failed to defend, and the centres handle these actions.

The Cali centres received some 2.5 million visits last year and 30 per cent of municipal service payments were made through them. "The intention is to take services to the citizen – not just so they can pay bills but also to integrate the local government and the community," says Maria Eugenia Pereira, who is working on modernizing the municipality's programmes with the help of UNDP.

The city's database is expanding rapidly and local centres are being linked to a computer network, allowing more bureaucratic decongestion. At the same time a huge mapping effort is providing a better tax base and important insights into urban structure. Mr. Guerrero has a large plan of the city on his office wall, and on it are marked the locations of homicides. Last year there were 1,700, about 85 per 100,000 people, indicating that Cali is rapidly becoming one of the most violent cities in Colombia.

By building up detailed information on each murder, patterns emerge on the map. "Look, here – there were five attacks near that bridge in one week. We know there's a gang operating there and we can do something about it," says the mayor.

His policy on the complex problem of violence is, however, to stress prevention and social programmes rather than repression. Already some peace agreements between gangs have been made and arms surrendered. City hall boasts an unusual sculpture in its foyer: a giant transparent cube filled with toy guns handed over by Cali kids.

Largely because of decentralization, Cali and Medellin are able to address a host of social problems that for too long have been neglected. Both cities, for example, are devoting considerable attention to the problems of unemployed and out-of-school young people, creating youth centres and encouraging sports clubs and cultural activities. Drug prevention has also become a major concern, particularly in Medellin, which recently launched a UN-backed anti-drug campaign using the slogan "Medellin – world prevention capital." The hope is to turn the image of Medellin as the world's cocaine capital on its head. The stark concentration of administrative buildings housing city government offices belies Medellin's commitment to decentralization. From health to recreation to social welfare, the city is making services more accessible to its residents.

"We have very good coverage of basic services – over 98 per cent of the population has drinking water and sewerage, and nearly 100 per cent of the population has electricity," says Mayor Luis Alfredo Ramos. "This allows us to have other kinds of plans, for health and the environment. Education is one of our main problems – there are places for only 65 per cent of secondary school students."

Mr. Ramos points to the growing army of NGOs as a force for decentralization. In Medellin, as in Cali, private companies and voluntary organizations sponsor special programmes and projects, including job training, family planning, libraries and homes for senior citizens. The number of regional TV channels covering local events and community publications is also growing.

New subcentres in the poorer barrios are taking shape as a result of these combined efforts, housing small businesses and co-operatives. Architect-planner Carlos Montoya describes them as "part of the process of consolidating communities, a way of stitching the barrio fabric together."

In Cali's vast Aguablanca shantytown (population 300,000), a private foundation pioneered three subcentres designed to increase access to essential goods and services. Apart from the savings bank, health and postal services, there is a large warehouse filled with basic household goods where barrio store owners can buy their stock at wholesale prices, cutting out intermediaries. Here too, recyclable items like glass and scrap iron can be exchanged for building materials and other goods. Outside, horse-drawn carts carrying sand, cement and bricks can be seen competing with buses on Aguablanca's chaotic, dusty streets.

The foundation also offers a training programme for small entrepreneurs operating in the Aguablanca subcentres. Nelsy Bergaño, beautifully dressed in an outfit she designed and made, took the course because she wants to expand her business. "The accounting part was very useful," she says. "I have three people working with me and three sewing machines at home. I've started a new line, executive clothing for secretaries. But there's a lot of competition." Other initiatives, such as helplines for information of all kinds, are sprouting up.

Moving hand in hand with the liberalization of the Colombian economy, decentralization is helping to create opportunities for regional privatization schemes, including garbage collection, electricity generating projects and contractual arrangements for public works.

Much of the groundwork has already been laid. But the crucial phase – the management of even larger chunks of fiscal income by local governments – is yet to come. This is going to put great strains on the national budget, on the technical capacity of the departments and municipalities, and on coordination among all the entities concerned. But as Ms. Vélez says emphatically: "The process has great vigour." ■

Brazilian-born journalist Sarita Kendall lives in Colombia. She is a correspondent for the Financial Times.

Largely because of decentralization, Cali and Medellin are able to address a host of social problems that for too long have been neglected.

Running Just to Stay in Place: Water, Health and the Environment

David Kinley / UNDP

Sanitation improvements are under way in Moshi Zongo, one of the poorest parts of Kumasi, Ghana.

Well after the end of the Water and Sanitation Decade, developing countries are still struggling with the twin challenges of unsafe drinking water and inadequate waste disposal. Progress has been uneven. Now the race is on against increasing urbanization, pollution and intensified competition for resources.

By David Kinley

A ramshackle settlement constructed of sticks, mud bricks, plastic bags and cardboard grows day after day on the fringe of a sprawling Third World metropolis. Children play in narrow pathways littered with garbage and streaming with raw sewage. A lone tap spurts water into the jugs and wash basins of scores of women and girls waiting in a queue. A baby lies listless beneath a sheet-tin lean-to, wasting away from the effects of intestinal parasites. The unfortunate scene could be almost anywhere in Africa, Asia or Latin America.

More than a dozen years ago, when the UN General Assembly launched the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade, there was hope and enthusiasm that this all too common picture of disease and degradation could be ameliorated, if not eliminated. The Decade campaign sought to mobilize governments, aid agencies, private groups and needy communities in a concerted effort to provide "safe water and sanitation for all."

Today the world body and experts alike are less sanguine. Despite national and international investment programmes surpassing US$130 billion since 1980, the situation remains desperate for hundreds of millions of people in slums and rural areas. With populations rising faster than ever, as many people today remain unserved as at the launching of the Decade, and they continue to suffer, physically and economically – often spending hours each day carrying water from distant sources. One in five people in the developing world won't live past age 50. In a third of these countries, one out of every 10 babies dies in its first year, very often from water-borne diseases.

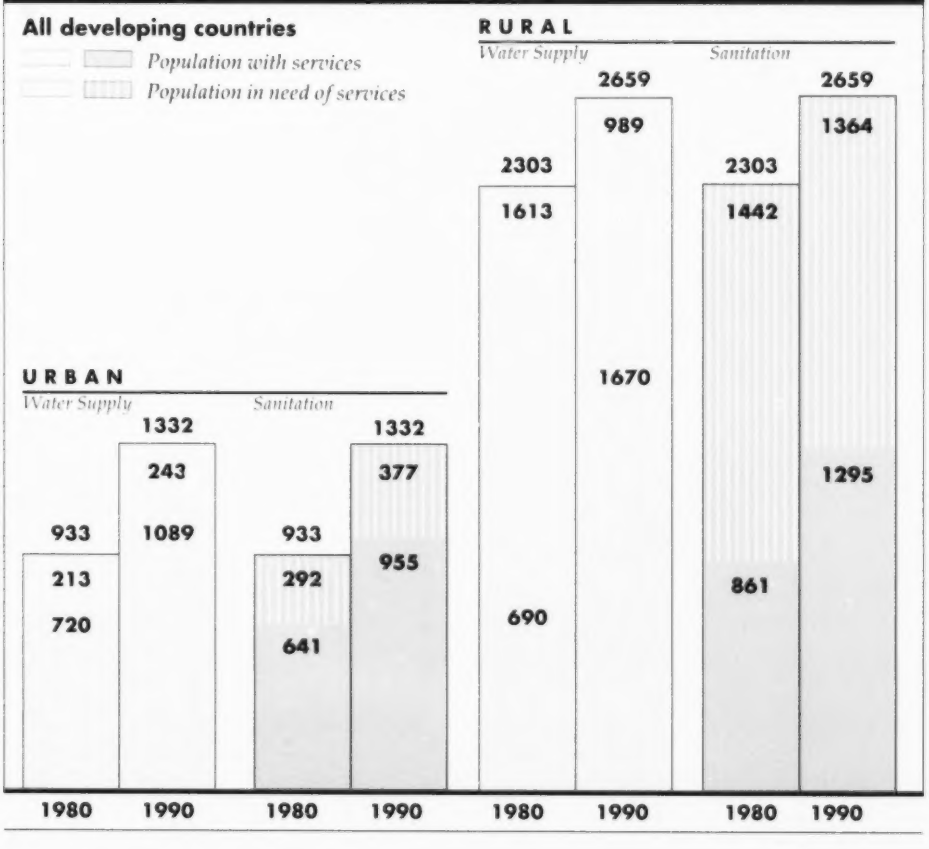
Was the Water and Sanitation Decade a failure? What did it achieve? What lessons about development were learned? And what are the prospects for the future?

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), over 1.3 billion people in the developing world gained access to safe water for the first time in the 1980s. Some 750 million gained access to improved sanitation facilities. Yet in 1990, over a billion rural and urban residents were still in need of safe water, and nearly two billion lived without proper sanitation.

"Rapid population growth in developing countries undermined the substantial progress that was made during the Decade," says Martin Beyer, former chief of UNICEF's water and sanitation section. "In the cities especially, we have been running very hard just to stay in place."

Aside from population growth, developing countries faced other obstacles to stepping up the pace of sector development: overall economic stagnation, shrinking government budgets, lackluster political commitment, and shortages of technical expertise.

Comparison of levels of service coverage —1980 and 1990 *(in millions)*



The global figures mask wide variations in sectoral performance from country to country, from region to region, and even locally. "The Decade was hardly a failure," says Frank Hartvelt, deputy director of UNDP's division for global and interregional programmes. "Many countries made laudable progress toward higher service coverage by putting an emphasis on community involvement and sustainable, low-cost technologies."

With populations rising faster than ever, as many people today remain unserved as at the launching of the Decade.

Even some of the world's least developed countries achieved considerable advances, especially in promoting rural water supplies. Despite its grinding poverty, Bangladesh, for example, was able to quadruple the number of public tubewells over the past two decades, thus raising rural water supply coverage to over 80 per cent (higher than the Dominican Republic), according to WHO.

Through a programme that has turned latrine-building into a cottage industry, mountainous Lesotho managed to raise rural sanitation coverage to 23 per cent by 1990, up from practically zero at the launch of the Decade. In Zimbabwe, strong support from the government and international donors, together with home-grown "appropriate" technologies, have helped to raise rural water coverage to 80 per cent (higher than Iran).

The world's two most populous countries, China and India, have made substantial strides in expanding water services to the poor in both cities and remote rural areas. Pakistan, Ghana and other countries have made measurable progress toward the eradication of the disabling water-borne parasite, Guinea worm.

But for every success story there is a tale of horror. The African continent is strewn with white elephants – broken pumps, empty water tanks and abandoned sewer lines that stand as testimony to good intentions and bad planning. Lagos, Nigeria has a major conventional sewer system that lies incomplete and unused due to a cutoff of funds. And World Bank officials readily explain that they are unsatisified with the performance of the water and sanitation sectors across the developing world.

One lesson learned was that the difference between success and failure could be influenced by the choice of technologies. Considerable efforts during the Decade were devoted to research and development of a new range of low-cost alternatives – simple handpumps that could be maintained cheaply by village people, improved pit latrines for rural areas, and inexpensive piped water systems and "simplified" sewerage for urban zones.

Making technologies more affordable and reliable facilitated greater community involvement in many localities and, ultimately, local ownership of systems – the best guarantee of continuous operation. In Orangi Township, a squatter settlement of nearly a million people in Karachi, Pakistan, almost 75 per cent of the households have sanitary latrines connected to an underground disposal system – a low-cost design costing less than $50 per household, and built by the residents with supervision from a community development group.

But technology alone is not the solution. WHO surveyed almost 100 developing country governments about what they saw as the main constraints hindering progress in the sector in the 1980s: they cited funding limitations, inadequate operation and maintenance, inadequate cost recovery, and insufficiently trained personnel as the

most significant among a list of some 20 major problems.

All the elements of a perfect vicious circle. Many, if not most, of the developing world's urban water and sanitation utilities are money-losing operations that subsidize services for relatively few of the better-off, leaving others to fend for themselves. In the worst cases, tariffs go uncollected, costs are not recovered, maintenance is neglected, water losses are very high, staff morale is low. Clearly, pouring more money into these institutions isn't a solution. Little will improve until they are made more responsive to their customers and potential customers.

Surveys undertaken in even the poorest communities reveal that residents are willing to pay a substantial portion of their income for better water and sanitation services. They also reveal that some of the poor pay many times the norm for water from trucks and other vendors. Residents in Lima, Peru pay more than $3 per cubic metre, higher than the cost of the best service anywhere in the developed world. Now a number of experts are arguing for a new approach that shapes investment programmes to better meet market demand.

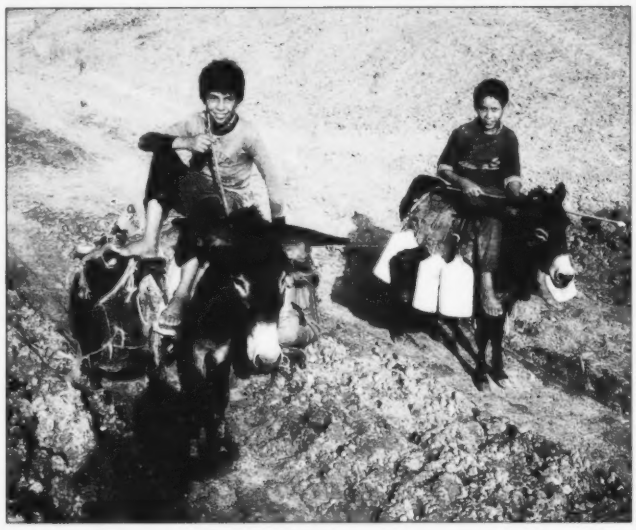
"We learned that poor people have a lot to say about what kind of services they want and will pay for," says Letitia Obeng, a Ghanaian public health engineer working in the World Bank's Africa regional office. "Governments need to get out of the business of providing services, and be responsible for facilitating the commercialization and privatization of these services to properly meet demand."

David Kinley / UNDP

Appropriate technology has helped boost water supply coverage to 80 per cent in rural parts of Bangladesh. Top: Bangladeshi women repair a water pump.

These reform principles are already being put into practice in a good number of developing countries. Buenos Aires has recently privatized its municipal water services with considerable success. Thanks to regulatory reform and corporate reorganization, Chile's water and sewerage services are among the highest quality and most efficient in Latin America. Countries as diverse as Côte d'Ivoire, Poland and Guinea are pursuing a range of strategies for encouraging private sector participation in water and sanitation services.

Surveys undertaken in even the poorest communities reveal that residents are willing to pay a substantial portion of their income for better water and sanitation services.



Emma Robson / UNDP

Despite dramatic increases in urban services, most rural dwellers in Morocco still travel long distances for water.

While the reform movement is gaining ground, a second reality is making the equation tougher: fresh water is an increasingly scarce commodity. Organic and chemical contamination combined with increasing demands on limited supplies are making water more and more expensive throughout the world.

"One lesson from the Decade is that we have to pay greater attention to the management of water resources," says John Briscoe, chief of the World Bank's water and sanitation division."A recent analysis of Bank-financed projects showed the cost of water doubling and even tripling from one project to the next as cities had to go farther and farther to find water of acceptable quality. The costs of poor water management policies are becoming unbearable in many areas." Indeed, many cities are losing over half of the water they put into distribution pipes through leakage, waste and diversion.

A new way to address the problem emerged out of several recent gatherings of water experts, in particular last year's International Conference on Water and the Environment in Dublin. The two principal recommendations: that water be treated as an economic good, and that it be managed at municipal or community levels. The reasoning goes that if communities contribute to the costs of new services that they benefit from, then they will have a stake in keeping them operational.

Getting central government agencies out of the business of local service provision would free up scarce public resources for badly needed investments such as treatment plants for wastewater, according to proponents like John Briscoe. Less than 10 per cent of all municipal sewage in Latin America is treated; most of it ends up in rivers and oceans with serious environmental consequences.

Whatever the progress of reform, the sector remains in a race against population growth and urbanization. The urban population in Africa skyrocketed 80 per cent during the 1980s. In Southeast Asia, cities grew by 50 per cent. The latest WHO projections of sectoral shortfalls by the year 2000 would alarm even a staunch Malthusian. And new demands for resources and technical aid for Eastern Europe may divert assistance from poorer regions.

Somehow – across the planet – everyone will get the water they need to survive and dispose of their waste each day. The question is at what price in terms of money, time and health, and at what cost to nature and future generations. Faced with the challenges of population growth, pollution and increasing competition for resources, the developing world is grappling for new approaches. In assisting them, the global community will need to provide a more unified and comprehensive set of initiatives than the Water Decade just to keep the glass half full. ■

David Kinley is the information coordinator for the UNDP-World Bank Water and Sanitation Programme in Washington, DC.

The repercussions of a 1988 earthquake are still being felt in Armenia.

Armenia's Unending Winter

UNDP is seeking to help Armenia weather a difficult transition to independence from former Soviet rule. But Armenia's ongoing conflict with Azerbaijan, and the economic blockade imposed by that country, have made the challenge far greater.

By David Orr

Yerevan — With hardly any electricity, Yerevan in winter is cold beyond belief. In the candlelit gloom of their apartments, families huddle around small wood-burning stoves and cook whatever food they have been able to forage in the sub-zero temperatures.

As the 1.3 million inhabitants of the Armenian capital confront their fourth winter of deprivation and misery, many are wondering whether they can survive it. Of course, most will. They are resilient and, more important, after 70 years of Soviet rule, they are used to hardship.

Stephen Wilson / Select

Short on fuel, Armenians are cutting down trees and burning furniture.

Despite its suppression during the Soviet years, the Armenian Apostolic Church is a major force and the people are imbued with a strong sense of religious fatalism. "God is angry with us, but what can we do?" asks a young woman doctor in Gumri, the northern Armenian city devastated by a massive earthquake in 1988.

"Armenians are mentally rugged, even stubborn," says Fabian McKinnon, the former deputy UN representative and UNDP representative in Yerevan. "They have an almost bottomless capacity to withstand and have survived thousands of years of difficulty as a people. They come through."

But not all of the country's 3.6 million people will survive the winter of 1994. In January and February the temperature will probably sink to minus 15 degrees centigrade, even to minus 20 for a while. Without heating, many elderly are likely to freeze to death in their homes and newborns may die. Only the most basic foodstuffs are affordable to the majority of people, who live on a diet of bread and potatoes only occasionally supplemented with meat or green vegetables. The frail will be vulnerable to disease because of malnourishment.

It was too cold last winter for children to go to school and many offices remained closed. In a desperate search for firewood, people hacked down trees in the parks and by the roadsides. Residents of apartment buildings tore up floorboards, cut down banisters and pulled out wooden window frames.

The main cause of these problems is the total economic blockade imposed by neighbouring Azerbaijan as a result of the two countries' dispute over the territory of Nagorno (mountainous) Karabakh. Armenia is supporting the area's ethnic Armenians who have been fighting for independence from Azerbaijan since 1988. Some 3,000 people have died in the four-year conflict and some 300,000 are homeless.

"Karabakh is for the Armenians what the Alamo was for Texas," says Mr. McKinnon. "It's not just a question of territory. It represents their right to assert their ethnicity in their own minds. But it's distracting the Armenian government and the people from more immediate problems, specifically the economy."

It was the Azeri blockade that dealt the critical blow to the run-down, centralized economy inherited by Armenia on the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. All essential supplies – everything from fuel to medicines – must be flown in from abroad. Deprived of Azeri oil, the energy source which had long sustained it, Armenian industry soon seized up. In the spring of 1993 only a handful of factories were functioning and productivity was estimated at a mere 15 per cent of what it was during the Soviet period. But the country's industrial sector showed signs of improving in the summer, according to a report by the Armenian Council of Ministers. However, a spokesman for the Armenian Embassy in London admits that industrial requirements were only being met at the expense of domestic needs.

Last year, UNDP became the first international organization to take up operations in Armenia, facing the same severe conditions that gripped the country. In opening, its office was something of a prototype, becoming one of the first UN offices to operate under a "unified" mandate, representing not only UNDP but the entire UN system. Another such office had opened in Azerbaijan.

While conditions grew progressively worse last winter because of the shortage of fuel and supplies, UN officials fear that the winter of 1994 could prove far more difficult unless a settlement is reached. "There will most likely be a far greater shortage this winter," says Reinhart Helmke, director of UNDP's division for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States. "But it's absolutely vital for UNDP to maintain a presence there and to continue assisting the country, especially as the office in Azerbaijan is remaining open; to close one would give the appearance of taking sides."

While the typical UNDP programme is geared to long-term development, this is not the case in Armenia – at least not for the moment. "We're supporting a short-term transition process during the immediate emergency," Mr. Helmke says. "And we're very active in helping Armenians create national institutions that can work with international organizations in setting up humanitarian aid packages."

Daniel Sheehan / Black Star

Food remains in short supply in Armenia, with bread and potatoes the main staples.

Landlocked and poor in resources, Armenia is a country with few friends in the region. Turkey, its neighbour to the east and Azerbaijan's traditional ally, has also closed its border with Armenia because of the conflict over Karabakh. Iran, which has close links with Muslim Azerbaijan, keeps its distance from Armenia.

But it is not until one travels within Armenia that the country's isolation is felt. Driving across the 50 kilometres of bleak highlands separating Yerevan from Gumri, one is struck by the harshness of the landscape. In the spring, the mountains and higher reaches of plateau are still covered with snow. The pastures produce a stunted, stubbly grass that can sustain only the hardiest creatures. The few villages seem sad and deprived places, lacking vitality and human warmth. Apart from roadside stalls and the occasional huckster's shop, there is little commerce. Food for the traveller is hard to come by, yet the Armenians are a hospitable people. Visitors to their homes are offered brandy, cognac, bottled fruit and jams, knowing all the while that such luxuries have been carefully hoarded for just such an occasion.

As anyone visiting the country soon discovers, electricity production is minimal and one comes to expect long periods of blackout. No coal, natural gas or oil is produced in Armenia. The only real source of power is a gas pipeline running down from Georgia to the north, which is regularly blown up by Azeri commandos. With no street lamps and only the occasional beams of light from passing cars, Yerevan by night is an eerie experience.

Armenia's domestic power source, the Metsamor nuclear plant southeast of Yerevan, has lain idle since the 1988 earthquake. The two pressurized water reactors, which once generated almost half the country's electricity, operated normally during the tremor but were closed for fear of a repeat of the 1986 Chernobyl disaster. The government is committed to reopening Metsamor but experts believe it would be unsafe to do so without massive spending. The estimated cost of repairing the reactors and installing Western safety systems is anywhere from $80 million to $120 million.

With an average monthly wage of only 5,000 roubles (US$7.50) and inflation running at 900 per cent, Armenia is suffering what Hrair Balian calls "a socio-economic crisis of critical proportions." Mr. Balian, a lawyer representing the American organization Human Rights Advocates in Geneva, estimates that three-quarters of the population are living below the poverty line.

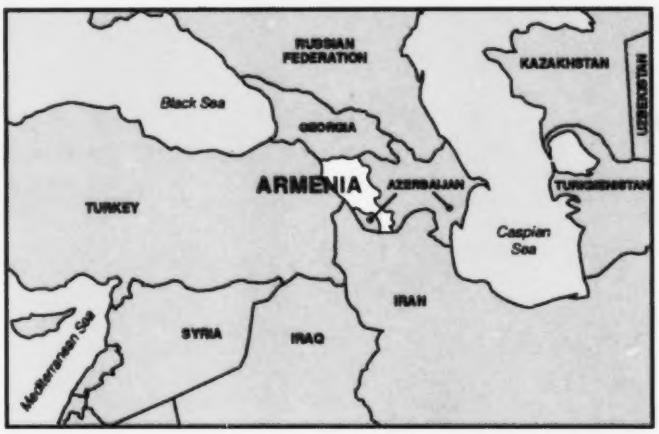
This situation, however, finds little political expression among the people, and the government appears powerless to get the country moving. There is little dissent and minimal public debate about national problems. It is as if 70 years of Soviet domination have sapped initiative and the will to question. It seems unlikely that parliamentary elections – at the time of writing scheduled for sometime in 1994 – will raise the level of political awareness significantly.

"Armenia's greatest tragedy is not the cold, the lack of disposable syringes or the ambulances which don't run," says Mr. McKinnon. "It is that the country is stopped in its tracks and no one is talking about it."

Like the other 14 former Soviet republics, Armenia is going through a difficult period of adjustment. It is in order to ease this process and to support the transition to a free market economy and a democratic political system that UNDP is working in Armenia and in other republics of the CIS.

"Armenians have an almost bottomless capacity to withstand and have survived thousands of years of difficulty as a people."

UNDP's role is based on a dual strategy. The first part involves technical assistance in such priority areas as privatization, energy, transport and state reform. Some of this assistance will be provided through UNDP's TOKTEN programme, which will bring skilled Armenians living abroad back to their homeland for short-term consultancies. There is also a commitment to helping establish "a social safety net" for vulnerable groups, to catch those left behind in the transition to a free-market economy. Already, high unemployment and rampant inflation have put basic social services beyond the reach of many.



The second part of UNDP's strategy, which is particularly urgent, involves humanitarian assistance. Last June, UNDP and the Government of Armenia launched a $22 million appeal to donors to cover such basic needs as food, shelter and medicine. As of this writing, 15-30 per cent of this amount has been committed.

Raising money to fund these initiatives is not easy. UNDP's programme budget is only $1.2 million for a five-year period that began in January 1993.

"Donor countries and the international community have been lukewarm towards the republics of the former Soviet Union," says Mr. McKinnon. "But we hope to attract more money by presenting interesting sectoral strategies concerning the environment, energy and the status of women. We also hope to harness more diaspora money – there are 3.5 million Armenians living abroad."

Singer Charles Aznavour and singer-actress Cher are among the expatriate personalities who have brought aid into Armenia. But the country's humanitarian needs are extreme. There are an estimated 334,000 refugees from Azerbaijan and Karabakh in Armenia, and of that number only 134,000 are believed to be receiving aid from organizations such as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

Then there are the 514,000 Armenians who are homeless as a result of the 1988 earthquake that struck Gumri, the country's second largest city, located on a high plateau near the Turkish border. Thousands of families still live in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions in metal containers and prefabricated houses, surrounded by a townscape of ruin and rubble. In the main square, the clock on the tower is stopped at 11:40, in testimony of the moment on 7 December when the earthquake hit. Between 20,000 and 25,000 people are thought to have died that morning.

On the outskirts languishes a "new city" of half-finished apartment blocks which was meant to house the thousands of residents made homeless. Started with money from Moscow soon after the earthquake, the project quickly ground to a halt with the superpower's collapse.

In addition to ruining nearly half the country's industrial base, the earthquake severely weakened its health-care capacity, destroying three of the five general hospitals in northern Armenia. Both the economic transition process and the blockade have further weakened the country's medical services. Most hospitals can now only carry out emergency operations.

Few Armenians claim to be happy with their lot. After all the years of Soviet rule, they had reason to hope for better times. But, in the words of a popular folk song that Armenians are fond of quoting, many believe that *Dzakhord orere Dzemeran nman gougan ou gerdan* – "The bad days will come and go like winter." ■

David Orr, an Irish correspondent based in London, writes for The Observer *and other publications.*

"Armenia's greatest tragedy is not the cold, or the ambulances which don't run, it is that the country is stopped in its tracks and no one is talking about it."

Human Rights Reconsidered:

A world conference fuels a fractious debate

By Christopher Reardon

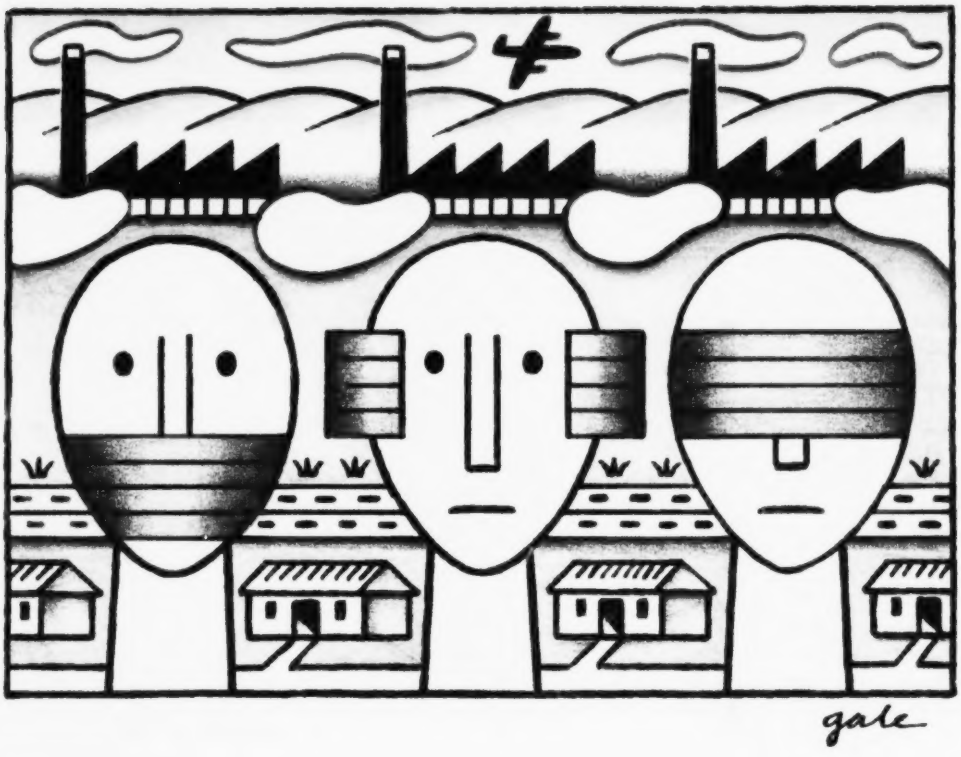
United Nations, Vienna — At first glance, the principles of human rights look as unobjectionable as a slice of *Sacher Torte*. But here in the birthplace of psychoanalysis matters are seldom that simple. Indeed, the World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna last June, elicited the sort of political machinations that characterized much Cold War diplomacy.

One major ideological rift that emerged lay between certain Asian, Middle Eastern and North African governments and almost everyone else. Led by China and Indonesia, this group argued that human rights are culturally relative and that the application of international human rights standards should take special consideration of economic factors. Fragile democracies in the developing world, the argument goes, must give more weight to the rights of the collective society than to individuals who may threaten its stability. "Human rights are vital and important," says Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas, but "so are efforts at accelerated national development." When the two come into conflict, he says, development must take priority.

Mr. Alatas added that the ongoing human rights debate is not so much between East and West or North and South, but between the principle of individual liberty and a strong lawful authority. "The implementation of human rights implies a balanced relationship between individual rights and the obligations of individuals towards their community," he said. Without such a balance, he continued, "the rights of the community could be denied, leading to instability and even anarchy, especially in developing countries.

"We in Indonesia and perhaps throughout the developing world cannot maintain a purely individualistic approach towards human rights," Mr. Alatas added. "There are other fundamental rights and concerns besides civil and political freedoms to which urgent attention should be devoted, such as the right of the vast majority of people to be free from want and fear, from ignorance, disease and backwardness."

Among the most vociferous critics of the development-first argument were activists from the very countries whose governments had raised the issue, maintaining that it simply serves as a justification to restrict human rights. In some cases they may be correct. But it is also true that until economic and social rights are regarded as seriously as civil and political rights, unjust working conditions, poor health and widespread



Illustrated by Bob Gale

poverty will continue to prevail in the developing world. And even within the human rights movement, activists sharply disagreed on the legitimacy of collective rights and on the most effective way to promote economic and social justice.

After two weeks of fractious debate, the conference concluded with a reaffirmation of the universality of human rights – which bears in mind cultural differences. It also offered a faint recommendation that the General Assembly continue considering the creation of a High Commissioner for Human Rights. Western governments and human rights activists worldwide were hoping for stronger statements on both issues.

However, opposition from certain Asian and African countries compelled the West to give ground. Critics say dissenting governments feared that a High Commissioner would be able to crack down more easily on abuses within their borders. The issue was a key sticking point in drafting and adopting the conference's final document, the non-binding, 33-page Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

At best, activists say, the declaration states the lowest common denominator among governments for the protection of human rights. And while many governmental delegations proclaimed the Conference a success, others were generally less sanguine. Pierre Sane, a Senegalese who is secretary-general of Amnesty International, said that victims of human rights violations find no relief in the fact that governments merely reaffirmed "the 50-year-old core values of universality, indivisibility and interdependence."

The Vienna Declaration breaks new ground in asserting the rights of women, children and indigenous peoples, but it does little to strengthen the United Nations' ability to promote and protect those rights. This absence of concrete measures diminishes, in the eyes of some, the value of a hard-won statement that "the universal nature of these rights and freedoms is beyond question." While the document calls on the General Assembly "to substantially increase" funding for UN human rights activities, it stipulates that any additional funds should come from within the United Nations' existing regular budget, rather than from added assessments on member governments.

Many participants at the World Conference strongly believe that human rights will dominate international affairs in the years to come, just as the Cold War had done in the past. To be sure, where containment interests guided many foreign policies before the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, today human rights records are the barometers by which governments evaluate one another. As peacekeeping and humanitarian missions continue to expand, the need for the United Nations to take a stronger stand on human rights is not likely to diminish.

CHOICES asked three spokespersons at the conference to share their views about the relationship between human rights, development and democracy. Following are excerpts from their remarks. Interviews by Christopher Reardon.

Kenneth Roth
Executive Director
Human Rights Watch

When human rights activists invoke civil and political rights, often it is on behalf of a dissident who has been thrown in jail for disagreeing with his or her government. Interpreted more aggressively, however, civil and political rights can have an even broader social impact. Promoting respect for freedom of expression and association, for example, is in my opinion the most effective way to address issues of development and economic well-being.

If you look at famines in today's world, you will find they are the direct product of civil and political rights abuses that prevent people from speaking out about governmental policies pertaining to food production and distribution. Similarly, restrictions on the right of trade unionists to organize and bargain collectively are largely responsible for perpetuating the low economic status of workers.

At Human Rights Watch we take issue with governments claiming that development must precede the luxury of respecting civil and political rights. We maintain that civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights are indivisible and that one cannot effectively purport to be advancing the economic or development interests of a society without respecting civil and political rights at the same time. If you defer on civil and political rights issues, you are handicapping a country's progress toward development. Unfortunately, this and other fundamental principles of the human rights movement have come under attack at this conference.

Apart from what emerges here, we will go forward and try to meet some of the very new and disturbing challenges to human rights that are emerging worldwide. One of the most significant developments is the epidemic of communal violence that has broken out in many parts of the world – such as in the former Yugoslavia. Armed forces are committing severe atrocities while professing to speak on behalf of an ethnic, national or religious group or some similar communal cause. Quite mistakenly, such violence is often viewed as simply the product of age-old hostilities that might have been repressed by an authoritarian system in the past.

In many countries that are emerging from communist or authoritarian rule, it is past restrictions on civil society, such as the illegality of forming voluntary associations, that have left people little but their ethnic or religious identity to fall back on in times of hardship. There's a pressing need to highlight the human rights causes of many of these conflicts, and to address those abuses in order to remedy, in the long term, the communal violence that is perhaps our foremost plague.

The notion of collective rights is mistaken, in my view, and directly fuels communal violence. What must be paramount are the rights of individuals. Some of these include the right to associate with others from one's community, the right to practise one's religion freely, the right to engage in one's culture, and the right to speak out. But when one starts asserting that communities or collectivities have rights, that's really an argument for restricting the rights of individuals. This, I think, is the foremost danger. Individuals should have the right to associate in a community freely, but communities should not have rights that can usurp the rights of individuals.

Elaine Hewitt
Barbadian women's rights activist

Caribbean women live in the New World, but there is nothing new in our stories of suffering and human rights violations. Along our historical voyage, we have witnessed and experienced the genocide of indigenous peoples and the enslavement of Africans for the purpose of economic exploitation. Women are still reeling from the social, political and economic legacy of this brutal history. Despite reports that we have attained equality with men, our everyday experiences in our homes and workplaces still speak of oppression and violation simply because we are women.

Many women in the Caribbean have sole responsibility for the economic well-being of their children. In fact, more than 40 per cent of our households are female-headed. Given the low wages and high unemployment, the contribution of low-income women to family earnings is significant. Still, in many Caribbean countries there are no laws granting women the right to maternity leave. The lowest level of minimum wage is typically accorded to the household assistant. These workers are women. The undervaluing of this work – cleaning, cooking and child care – reflects most poignantly the societal perception of a woman's worth.

Women's economic vulnerability is deepened by structural adjustment policies dictated by international financial institutions. In our countries, resources are often cut to service the external debt at the expense of the social sector. For women, though, cutting government expenditures has meant reduced access to health care, education, housing and social security benefits. The majority of those who have lost their jobs under these poli-

cies are also female. In sum, this means greater poverty for women. So the people who benefited the least from the international loans – women and children – are now being made to bear the greatest burden.

Also troubling is the relationship between economic underdevelopment and violence against women. While violence against women occurs in all social classes, there is no disputing that poverty reduces a woman's power to resist. Studies from Guyana show that women of low-income status suffer violence more frequently than wealthier women and have fewer options to escape. I can attest to domestic violence. I am a sufferer, a survivor.

Indeed, many Caribbean states have yet to legislate in the area of the private sphere of the home, where women are the most vulnerable to abuse by men. By failing to pass laws that would stem domestic violence, these states condone that violence and the subordination of women. What is more, the procedural and emotional difficulties that a woman must overcome before asserting her legal rights cannot be overstated. There is little concern for the victim's rights and still less for the collective right of all women to security of person.

Caribbean women don't have the luxury of addressing only political and civil liberties. We don't have the luxury of only concerning ourselves with economic development issues. We don't have the luxury of compartmentalizing women's rights. Equity, personal safety and integrity are as important to us as the right to a job and health.

Adnan Buyung Nasution
Indonesian civil rights lawyer

Governments that reject the universality of human rights on the basis of supposed cultural differences often do so by misconstruing the history of the human rights movement. Despite its origins in the Western Hemisphere, concern for human rights is not a Western phenomenon. It emerges wherever people are oppressed, which is likely to be everywhere on Earth, at one time or another. Human rights are not a question of culture. They are a question of the struggle against injustice, which transcends all cultures, all traditions.

Another mistaken argument commonly advanced by some governments ranks the right to development above civil and political rights. This is not entirely new, as communist countries were using similar arguments in the 1960s. What is striking, however, is that the development argument is no longer based on community or social rights, but on a model of democracy introduced by the United States, the so-called economic growth model. Certain countries have been opposing foreign intervention for decades, and by adopting the language of economic development they simply hope to make their position more defensible.

I acknowledge progress in development in Indonesia, but it has come at the cost of the suffering of a majority of the people – the poor, the underprivileged. There is no guarantee whatsoever that the proceeds of development will be equally or justly distributed to the majority. This is the reality in many developing countries. When I look at the politicians arguing against the universality of human rights, I think they also do not believe it. To my knowledge no NGOs are making such arguments.

In any democracy, of course, you have to strike a balance between individual and collective rights. If a country established a government based on genuine democracy, then all the elements would be balanced. The question is how to develop and at the same time be democratic. That's a process. I know it cannot be achieved in a fortnight, but the direction must be clearly toward democracy. That's why I'm critical of efforts to develop economies but not social conditions.

I do not advocate cutting off aid entirely. But I do believe that human rights should be used as a yardstick for giving aid to developing countries. Aid is something to use in negotiating, a bargaining chip. ■

Christopher Reardon covered the World Conference on Human Rights for the Christian Science Monitor. *He is a freelance writer based in New York City.*

The paper "Human Rights, Democracy and Development: Lessons From the Field" was produced by UNDP and the Centre for Human Rights for the Vienna Conference. Copies can be obtained by contacting the Programme and Support Division, UNDP, Room 2036, One UN Plaza, New York, NY 10017.
Fax: 212-906-5313.

Voting for Change in Niger

At a time when civil and political unrest are rocking several African countries, Niger's successful elections earlier this year and its peaceful transition to civilian rule are a welcome bright spot in the region. Momentous and ground-breaking, the country's first multi-party elections ushered in a young and energetic civilian government headed by President Mahaman Ousmane, taking over from the previous regime that was put in place by the military.

The event was truly historic for this land-locked Sahelian country. "A population that never before went to the polls for multi-party elections went four times in four months," notes Louise Kantrow, an electoral specialist sent to Niger by the UN's Electoral Assistance Unit of the Department of Political Affairs, with funding from UNDP.

The four elections took place between December 1992 and March 1993. They included a referendum for a new Constitution and both National Assembly and presidential elections. The new government of the CDS party (Convention Sociale et Démocratique) was inaugurated in April.

UNDP played a pivotal role in the electoral process by mobilizing and coordinating donor support and by training and overseeing a team of international observers drawn from countries including Belgium, Benin, Canada, Chad, Denmark, Egypt, France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland and the US.

In all, about 40 per cent of Niger's registered voters lined up to cast their ballot – including many women. "This was certainly revolutionary for Niger," Ms. Kantrow says. "In this Muslim country women were encouraged to vote, and many did."

The atmosphere leading up to the elections was tense, as the country was in the throes of a Touareg uprising in the north. The Touaregs, a proud, traditional nomadic group, were rebelling against the previous administration, which they claimed had weakened and exploited their mineral-rich province of Agadez.

A truce was reached early in the electoral process, and many Touaregs turned out to vote the new government into power.—*S.K.*

Photo Louise Kantrow

Forty per cent of Niger's registered voters turned out for the country's first multi-party elections.

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